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Shirley

The heroine of E. V. Cunningham's newest thriller is Shirley, a tough, resilient New York office girl who has seen so much that nothing can surprise her, not even the two men who come to her flat one evening intending to kill her. Why anyone should *want* to murder Shirley Campbell is something that neither she, nor her friend Cynthia Kugelman, nor her admirer Mr Bergan, nor the tough and tender cop whose case this becomes, understand for quite a while. Meantime, through hair-raising adventures that involve a dead heiress, a multi-millionaire and a phoney prince as well as a touchy bunch of crooks, the intrepid Shirley bobs like a cork giving every page of this exciting and entertaining story a delightful sparkle.

by E. V. Cunningham

ALICE

PHYLLIS

SYLVIA

E. V. CUNNINGHAM

Shirley

AN ENTERTAINMENT

ANDRE DEUTSCH

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Shirley

1. The Killers

In the course of her twenty years, so much had happened to Shirley Campbel—and so little of it pleasant—that she was not surprised that two men whom she had never seen before should express a desire to kill her. Of course, she was frightened and unhappy, but not unduly surprised. Out of her own knowledge and experience, no girl had the right to be surprised at anything a man did, and conversely, nothing that a man did should be entirely unexpected.

Yet with a thing as drastic as this, Shirley felt that a certain amount of forewarning or preparation was both required and deserved. Her own mother, in her sober intervals, had been fond of saying that where there is smoke, there's bound to be fire. Shirley properly felt that where there is fire, there should be a little smoke. That only made sense. In films and television and books—the only clarification for the confusion that enclosed Shirley and which was popularly called life—victims were dolts. They were surrounded by signs of impending doom that everyone else recognized, and which only they failed to perceive. But thinking back over this particular night, Shirley could not recollect one single thing that had impended.

She had gone to work in the morning—a morning no different than any other morning. She worked for Bushwick Brothers, who were manufacturers of various things

in plastics and who occupied an entire building on East Houston Street. Shirley was in the credit department, and operated an automatic billing machine, a reasonably skilled and important job, the result of the fact that she tested well. She had always tested well. In her first year of high school, she had come out of a series of tests with an IQ rating of 127. Her card said, "High degree of native intelligence." That was a sort of consolation prize for the teachers who had to teach her and face, each day, her hard, dark and veiled eyes. Never knowing what lay behind them, it was some relief to accept that fact that, if nothing else, at least 127 degrees of intelligence were present and active.

Shirley's boss at Bushwick, Mr. Morrow, often felt the same way. He made a habit of walking down the aisle at the office, twelve desks at each side of him, a girl and a machine at each desk, and passing his grimly aware look over each of them, as if he were daring them to face him. The only one who ever did was Shirley; it made for no joy between them. Mr. Morrow was a small, fat man, and Shirley looked through him, and as he told his assistant, Mr. Bergan, he was only waiting for his day. "The day comes, she goes. I don't like that girl. I like to know what someone is thinking. I like a bright-faced, open-eyed girl."

"You're a fat little ass-pincher," Mr. Bergan said to himself. "You're a miserable slob, and you can't make a minute of time with her, so you want to fire her. People like you turn my stomach."

But aloud, he agreed. "Absolutely, Mr. Morrow," he said, thinking that if it wasn't for the way Shirley did her hair and that if she cared one damn about how she looked, she would be the best-looking kid on the floor. Like hell

he would fire her! When the lunch break came, he met her on the way to the elevator, and said, "How about it, chickie, you and me and my little place in the Village? We can just complete the frame in one hour."

"Drop dead," Shirley told him, smiling.

"Why?" Mr. Bergan demanded.

"What do you mean, why?"

"You tell me to drop dead," Mr. Bergan specified.

"Then I got a right to ask you why. In fact, it is implicit upon me to ask you why."

"Who told you to drop dead?" Shirley wanted to know.

"You did. Just a moment ago."

"Oh? Well, didn't you proposition me just a moment ago? Didn't you make a stupid crack about going down to your place in the Village during my lunch hour? Well, I feel constrained to set you straight about one thing, Mr. Bergan. In my lunch hour, I eat lunch, period."

"So what else did I ask you but to eat lunch with me?"

"The little place in the Village?"

"That was just in a manner of speaking," Mr. Bergan explained.

"So just in a manner of speaking, drop dead."

"There you are. That's positively the most hostile thing you can say."

"What's hostile about it?" Shirley asked indignantly.

"How would you feel if I dropped dead?"

"I'd feel that you had a very bad heart, Mr. Bergan, and why do you have to take every word I say personally?"

"Because I just happen to feel personal about what you say."

"So as soon as you start feeling personal about what you say instead of what I say, Mr. Bergan, we will re-

examine the situation. And furthermore, the next time you proposition me for a lunch, leave your little place in the Village out of it."

To this, Mr. Bergan had no answer at all. Tall, long of arm and long of face, and reminding Shirley of nothing more than an attenuated cocker spaniel, he stood staring after her as she walked away with her friend Cynthia Kugelman. Cynthia was long-limbed, pretty, and had a rich head of hair that was presently blond. In her stocking feet, she was five feet eight and a half inches tall; with high heels, which she insisted on wearing, she was almost as tall as Mr. Bergan. She and Shirley walked over to Mott Street to Mama Maria's Pizza Place, where pizzas were crisper and tastier than anywhere else south of Houston Street. Cynthia had her pizza plain, while Shirley had the special, with sausage and anchovies, half and half.

While they were waiting for the pizzas to cook, Cynthia told Shirley that while it was none of her business, she couldn't help overhearing the last of what went on between Shirley and Mr. Bergan.

"I don't read him," Shirley said.

"What is he, a book that you got to read him?"

"Just not interested," Shirley said.

"From your whole approach to this question," Cynthia said, "you would think that single men grew on trees."

"I'm just old enough to know that the stork doesn't bring them."

It was then that Cynthia made an observation that Shirley would remember during the events of the following three days. She explained that she was not speaking subjectively, but that she felt close enough to Shirley to say whatever was on her mind.

"Feel free," Shirley nodded.

"This wisecracking—constantly."

"Me?"

"Who else? This is a very serious world, Shirley. I was reading the other day in an article that we only exist statistically."

"And with the help of some pizza," Shirley said as they were served.

"Exactly. So was my Aunt Leah."

"What was your Aunt Leah?"

"She was clever. In fact, she was too smart for her own good. Nobody was good enough for her, so now at the age of fifty-five, she is unmarried."

"We will introduce her to Mr. Bergan," Shirley replied through a mouthful of pizza."

But otherwise, Shirley's luncheon was no more eventful than on any other day. The weather was excellent, and Shirley and Cynthia strolled slowly back to the factory. It was a pleasant, sunny day, even at Mott and Houston, where enough trucks thunder by to insure a liberal perfume of gas and oil fumes—but not quite enough to blanket the west wind, cool and refreshing as it was this day.

The afternoon at the office passed uneventfully, and Shirley decided to walk home to her apartment in Minetta Street, two rooms on the third floor and no elevator. But the rent was only fifty-five dollars a month. On the way, she stopped at the Hudson Cleaners and picked up a dress that had been dry-cleaned, and she also stopped at the Chrome Delicatessen, where she bought a cornbeef sandwich with coleslaw and mustard, a quart container of skim milk and a packaged pound cake with raisins. Most often, she cooked her own supper if she didn't have a date—

and right now she was not dating at all—since she considered delicatessen food a poor reflection on character; but tonight she was too tired to think about cooking. All she was looking forward to was a slow, relaxed spell of food consumption in front of the television.

After she put the milk in the refrigerator, she went into the bathroom and took off her make-up and brushed her teeth.

"See, I'm brushing," she said to the mirror. "See, stupid, I'm brushing, so don't give me commercials from the walls, did I brush my teeth?"

She was going to take off her blouse and skirt and put on a bathrobe, but suddenly she was overwhelmingly hungry, and she decided to eat. The television could wait, she decided, and while she ate the sandwich and the cake and finished the quart of milk, she read her book. It was one of the top four books on the best-seller list. As far as her membership in the lending library was concerned, she read only the top four on the best-seller list; and as she explained to the girls at the office, if it couldn't make the top four, it wasn't worth reading. Also, since she had only a limited amount of time for reading, that was enough. It gave her sufficient status, because most of her associates stuck to television and the films and did not read at all.

Shirley always ate slowly. Odds and ends of things she read impressed her deeply, and she had once read that a slow, unhurried intake of food is a sign of good breeding. Being aware that she was somewhat on the short side with such elements, she had taken to eating slowly.

"It won't make me a debutante," she had explained to one of her friends, "but every little bit helps."

Reading slowed her even further. The cornbeef sand-

wich took twenty minutes. Four slices of raisin cake took ten minutes a slice. She was sitting at a tiny white enamel table in a tiny kitchen, and as she sat there, eating and reading, it turned dark outside. The doorbell rang as she rose to put on the light, and she turned on a lamp in the living room as she walked through to the door.

There were two men at the door. One was small and skinny and walked with a limp. He was so skinny that he was linear, his shoulders incredibly narrow, his head long, narrow and snakelike. He had the white hair of an albino and pink rabbit eyes, and the moment he came into the room, he took a pistol, with a silencer attached, out of his coat pocket, pushed Shirley back into the room, and pointed the pistol at her and said:

"Right there, sister. Just stand still and don't open your yap. This gun has a silencer. It don't make a bang, it just goes poof. So you open your yap or scream or start any nonsense, you're dead. Get that?"

Shirley nodded. Her first attempt to speak left the words yawning in her mouth. With her second attempt, she managed to ask in a whisper who they were and what they wanted.

The second man was large, fat and swarthy. His skin was yellow-brown. His hat sat on the back of his head, and thick, oily ringlets of hair protruded from under it and lay across his forehead. He had enormous lips that he kept moistening with his tongue. He closed the door carefully behind him, and then examined the room. It was Shirley's living room, ten by twelve feet, and containing a foam-rubber couch, two foam-rubber chairs, a table that opened to a miraculous size, two end tables and a television set.

It had cost Shirley an incredible amount of planning, saving and shopping, but he gave it no more than a glance. Then he stepped to her bedroom, gave that a glance and then looked into the kitchen.

"What do you want here?" Shirley whispered. "What is this—a stickup? If it's a stickup, my purse is over there on the chair. Go ahead and take it. Go ahead."

"Shut your yap," said the skinny man.

"Drop dead," Shirley said. She was beginning to return to normal and think and use her 127 points of intelligence.

The fat man had said nothing, and now he took out his wallet, and out of the wallet, he took a picture. Shirley didn't see the picture, only the back of it, as the fat man looked at the picture, at her and again at the picture. He then switched on another lamp, walked over to Shirley and tilted her head with the pressure of one dark thumb. The nail at the end of the thumb was crowned with a black moon, and Shirley pulled away and told him to keep his hands off her.

"She's a snotnose, huh?" said the skinny man.

"Just drop dead," Shirley told him.

"Just shut your yap, sister. That's all I'm telling you—just shut your yap."

"I bet you sit at the manicurist all day," she told the fat man, managing to smile. She was still shaking and her stomach felt like an aching, empty cavern, but all in all, her control of herself was improving. All she had read, experienced, seen on television or in the movies led her to the conclusion that for some incomprehensible reason these two men were going to kill her. Why, she had not the faintest idea, but neither had she lived her twenty years in a world where effect could be traced to cause. Therefore

she was less surprised than worried; she had trained herself never to be surprised—or almost never.

The fat man took out his wallet again and removed a second picture. He held the two pictures like cards, looking from them to Shirley.

"Well?" demanded the skinny man.

"It's her, Francis. It's her. Absolutely, I'm sure." He had an accent. Shirley didn't know what kind of an accent. French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian—it could have been any one of them.

"Lousy dump like this—she looks like she belongs here," said the skinny man. "Talks like she belongs here. She got a yap like a tramp, you ask me—"

"Just shut up and drop dead," Shirley interrupted.

"See?"

"I tell you, this is the girl. She is very clever, this one—always, she has that reputation. How do you expect her to talk?"

"Like Katherine Hepburn. OK—so this is it. Get her coat or something." And then he said to Shirley, "You come along with us, sister, and don't make no trouble."

"Why?" Shirley demanded.

"For Christ's sake—why? Why? Because I say so! Because this says so!" He gestured at the gun.

"I don't want to go," Shirley said thinly.

"You don't want to go. You want me to rap you over the head with this? Is that better? You go. You go quietly like a lady, and you keep quiet."

Meanwhile, the fat man had found a coat in the closet, and he handed it to Shirley.

"That's my winter coat," she snapped.

"So it's your winter coat," Francis said.

"It goes to the cleaner. I'm not wearing it now."

"She's crazy, huh?" the fat man said. "You think she's crazy, Francis?"

"Let her get her own damn coat."

Shirley went to the closet, got her spring coat and put it on—and now her stomach contracted and she felt that she was going to be sick. She controlled herself, however, not only because she couldn't bear the thought of it happening to her brand new living-room rug, but because she felt that her only hope of emerging from this nightmare lay in preserving her physical well-being and her senses too. She was not a hysterical type; she had not actually wept since the age of ten; and while she was still deeply worried, she was less afraid than she had been a few moments before. If they were taking her somewhere, it meant at least that they were not going to kill her right here and now, which would be worse for her rug and for her than being sick.

They let her pick up her purse and open it, and she took out her comb and looked at herself in the small mirror, while she combed her thick, black hair.

"Now what the hell is this—?" the man called Francis began, but interference is almost impossible when a woman is combing her hair, and as she combed it, she assured them that they were making a mistake.

"Sure, we're making a mistake. Enough of the hair."

"Put out the lights," Shirley told them as they pressed her toward the door. "Con Edison will survive better than me."

Shaking his head, the fat man put out the lights. The skinny man assured her that his gun was in her ribs. "It don't go bang, remember—just poof, like that."

"She's a nut," said Francis, the skinny man, as they got into the front seat of a black car that was parked on Minnetta Street. "I tell you, she's a nut. Is that what you're looking for, a nut?"

"I'm tired of telling you to drop dead," Shirley said. "You got a big mouth."

"I'll tell you what I'm going to give you, sister, you don't shut up—a mouthful of teeth."

The fat man started the motor, switched on the headlights and told them to stop squabbling.

"Just like that," Shirley said. "I'm supposed to be killed, but I shouldn't squabble."

"Listen to the way she talks," said Francis.

"You got any sense, Francis?" the fat man told him. "Or you got no sense, maybe? This is the girl."

"If she ain't?"

"She is—she ain't—she seen us. That is enough, yes?"

"Then let's get it over with."

They drove up Sixth Avenue, and at Nineteenth Street the fat man signaled a left turn and began to turn the wheel. Shirley put her left foot on top of his, which was on the gas pedal, and bore down with all her strength. The big car picked up speed. The fat man flung back an arm at her and let go of the wheel. Shirley winced at the blow across her face, slid down in the seat and bore down on the foot with all her strength. The car swung to the right. The fat man struggled with the wheel. The skinny man cursed, and the car swung violently to the left again, taking the corner at better than forty miles an hour, riding on the uptown curb and then hurtling across the side street, throwing Shirley to her left, behind the fat man. It was a matter of a few seconds altogether before the car, at

forty or forty-five miles an hour, crashed headlong and head on into a glass storefront with a sound that could be heard ten blocks away.

Francis, the skinny man, went through the windshield. The fat man had his chest caved in by the steering shaft and his skull caved in by the door frame. Cushioned between the fat man and the back of the front seat, Shirley had the wind knocked out of her, and when she managed to crawl out of the car, she tore her new spring coat. She looked at Francis and became sick, and then as the first spectator came running toward the scene of the accident, she picked her way through the broken glass and walked back to Sixth Avenue.

She felt sick, bad and forlorn, but unable to feel much sorrow for either of the two men. They had brought it on themselves, she assured herself.

2. The Police

When Shirley got to the police precinct, she was tired, and she told herself that for two cents she would give up the whole thing and go home. It reflected her feelings about the police, this attitude that at best they were neutrals and and at the worst, they were her natural enemies. When, the following day, Shirley related the facts to her friend Cynthia, who worked with her at Bushwick Brothers, Cynthia said, "Sure, sure, so you don't go to the cops. Where do you go? The SPCA?" "I should have gone to bed," said Shirley, and Cynthia said, "Sure, sure, a couple of goons try to kill you, but you should have gone to bed." "But I went to bed anyway," said Shirley, "with five large hours of sleep."

Yet it was still before nine o'clock that evening when Shirley walked into the precinct and over to the duty sergeant behind his mahogany rail. It was a slow, middle-of-the-week night. An old woman sat on a bench, crying quietly. A small boy sat on a table at the other side of the room, very seriously eating a large five-cent pretzel, and while Shirley was there, two drunks were brought into the main room and through it and then taken out. The old woman kept on crying.

"What can I do for you, lady?" the sergeant asked Shirley.

"I don't know."

"Then what are you here for, lady?" the sergeant asked patiently.

"I'm here because a couple of goons tried to kill me," Shirley said with some impatience. "Is it the wrong place? Where should I go—City Hall?"

"Take it easy," the sergeant said. "What do you mean—a couple of goons tried to kill you?"

"They tried to take me for a ride."

"That don't mean they wanted to kill you, lady."

"No, they were just dating me. Then they tried to get fresh. Do I look like a nut?"

"You look upset," the sergeant said.

"Oh, no. I'm not upset. I'm as calm as a daisy."

At that moment, two officers brought in a squirming seventeen-year-old boy. Shirley lit a cigarette while they booked him. The old lady stopped crying, came over and asked Shirley what the seventeen-year-old had done.

"He knocked over the First National Bank," Shirley replied, and the old woman shook her head and said that it just didn't seem possible, he looked like such a nice boy.

"Then he blew up Brooklyn Bridge. How do I know?"

The old lady then began to cry again, and Shirley, who bore her no malice, felt guilty and miserable, and tried to console her. Apparently the old woman had been waiting for someone to console her, and she told Shirley that she was there because her cat was lost, and that it had been lost since three o'clock in the afternoon, and she had been sitting there since six o'clock, and that she was alone in the world except for the cat. "Maybe you think that a person shouldn't feel that way about a cat, but that's the way I feel. That's just the way I feel. There's nothing I can do about it. Maybe you're not supposed to care so much

about a cat. But it seems to me that if you do, you do. It's not sinful. Do you think it's sinful?"

Shirley did not think it was sinful. She was so moved by the old woman's loss of the cat that for the moment she forgot why she was there, and the sergeant had to shout to get her attention.

"Miss, what's your name?"

"My name?"

"Your name. That's right, your name. Unless you want to forget about the whole thing and go home?"

"Great," Shirley nodded. "Forget about it and go home. Just tell me, if you were in my place, would you forget about it and go home?"

"All I'm asking is your name."

"Shirley Campbel."

"How do you spell that?"

"Shirley—S-h-i-r-l-e-y. Campbel—C-a-m-p-b-e-l."

"You mean—C-a-m-p-b-e-l-l?" the sergeant asked her.

"I mean C-a-m-p-b-e-l."

"That ain't the way Campbell's spelled, Miss."

"So why ask me how to spell it?"

"I'm just asking you one L or two Ls? That's all, lady."

"I told you—one L."

"All right, if that's the way you want it."

"That's the way I want it."

"And you're sure you want to make a complaint?"

"I don't want to complain. Look at me—am I the complaining type? I don't even want to marry you—"

"Thank God."

"—and that goes both ways. I just came in here to inform you that a couple of hoodlums tried to kill me. I should have known better."

"All right. Levy!" he called to an officer who had just entered. "Take this lady up to Lieutenant Burton."

Up a flight of stairs, Lieutenant Burton's office was a small room with spotted buff walls that fought to maintain the curling paint of a generation ago. Burton, a heavy-set man in his late forties, sat down at an old wooden desk, after seating Shirley on one of the two straight wooden chairs which, with a filing cabinet, completed the furnishings of the room. After studying Shirley for a long moment, Burton dropped his gaze to the sheet of paper Officer Levy had deposited on his desk.

"You spell your name like this, Miss Campbel—one L?"

"Sue me," said Shirley.

"We can live without the wisecracks."

"I can live with my name the way it is, too. What is it—a crime for me to spell my name that way?"

"It's no crime. Only I've never seen Campbell spelled with one L."

"All right. I'll go to court and change it."

"Just take it easy, Miss Campbel. According to this, you allege that someone tried to kill you?"

"Someone. That's right."

"You want to tell me about it?"

"Oh, no. I'm only here to argue about my name."

"Look, miss," Lieutenant Burton said, "I'm trying to be polite and straightforward about this. We get a lot of complaints from all kinds of people. It's easier if you co-operate. According to the desk sergeant, a couple of boys took you for a ride and got fresh. Well, you're an attractive girl. It happens. Is that it?"

"No," said Shirley. "That's not it."

"Then tell me."

"All right. Tonight two goons I have never laid eyes on before knock on the door of my apartment, and when I open the door, they push their way in—"

"Where do you live, Miss Campbel?"

"Two-twelve Minetta Street."

He wrote as she spoke, his wide face impassive.

"They push their way in, a large fat one and a skinny little runt. The skinny one has a gun with a silencer attached—"

"How do you know it was a silencer, Miss Campbel?"

"I watch television. Friday and Saturday I date, if a date is there. Sunday, sometimes, the girls get together. The rest of the week, well the nightclubs and how much theater can a girl take? So I watch television occasionally—"

"Let's get back to your story, Miss Campbel."

"The fat one takes out some snapshots and compares the prices with me—"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean he looks at the pictures and then he looks at me, and then he decides I'm right."

"For what?"

"For killing, Officer? Or do you like to be called Detective?"

"Lieutenant Burton."

"OK, Lieutenant. So he compares, and then I'm it."

"You live alone, Miss Campbel?"

"On my wages, you couldn't keep a cat. I live alone. I'm an orphan. Do you want to feel sorry for me? You don't believe a word I'm saying, do you?"

"Suppose you tell me the rest of it. Did you see these snapshots?"

"No."

"Then what happened?"

"They took me downstairs and we got into this big black car—"

"Oh?"

"It could have been yellow or pink. It was black, so sue me. We drive over to Sixth Avenue and start uptown, and all the time I'm turning over in my mind how it feels to be dead. My life hasn't exactly been a bed of roses, Lieutenant, but when I looked back over it, I preferred it to being dead. That's only natural, isn't it, Lieutenant? So when we got to Nineteenth Street, and this fat goon who's driving starts to make a left turn, I put my foot down hard on his gas-pedal foot. He lost his head, like I was hoping, and the car ran wild into a storefront. I was jammed behind the fat one and the seat was behind me, so all I got was the wind knocked out of me. I guess they're both dead. That's it."

Shirley finished, and Detective Burton stared at her, and for a long moment nothing at all was said. Then he took a deep breath and asked her whether all this had happened tonight.

"I told you. Then I walked over here and got into a discussion about how to spell my name with that bright one you keep downstairs. He also brought up the rule about you can't use just one L. But he insisted harder than you did."

"You say the car crashed on Nineteenth Street and Sixth?"

"Nineteenth and Sixth," Shirley nodded.

Detective Burton breathed deeply and picked up the phone. "Give me the desk," he said, and then he said, "Did a car crash at Nineteenth and Sixth?" A pause. "When?" A pause. "I see, the girl ran away. I see—no, don't tell me. It's better if I don't know. It's better for my peace of mind. A car crashes. The two men in it are armed and dead. A girl leaves the scene of the accident, and you keep it a secret. That's good . . . And you're sending the stuff up to me—that's very kind of you." He put the phone down, looked at Shirley, shook his head, took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one to her. She thanked him and accepted, and he lit it for her, and then he asked her how she felt.

"Lousy," Shirley replied.

"You're not hurt. You don't want us to send you to the hospital?"

"I'm fine," Shirley said. "I just feel lousy. I thought there was a limit to how men behave."

"Not at all," Burton said. "No limit. You were in that car?"

"Like I said."

"You want to tell me about it again."

Shirley repeated her story, and this time Burton interrupted more frequently with questions. While they were talking, a patrolman entered, carrying a wire basket. In the basket, there were two pistols, one of them with a silencer, a switch-blade knife, and a large brown envelope. He put it down on Burton's desk, and Burton asked Shirley to excuse him for a moment or so.

"Can I go now?" Shirley wanted to know.

Burton said no, she'd have to stay for a while, and was she hungry?

"That's to laugh," Shirley said. "Hungry! No, Lieutenant, I am not hungry."

He said that they didn't like to have anyone go hungry, and that they might be at it for a while. He had a can of peanuts on his desk. "Try some," he said. She shook her head. He took a handful and began to munch.

The brown envelope held the personal possessions of the two men in the black car. Burton emptied it onto his desk and sorted it out, two wallets, a roll of money, some keys, cartridges for the guns. Shirley watched him go through the wallets, and from one of them he took the two pictures. He stared at them, and then passed them to Shirley.

"They're pictures of you, Miss Campbel."

Shirley looked at them. Each was a portrait head, not simply snapshots, but excellent pictures taken by a professional or 'an extremely competent amateur. Staring at Shirley from one of the pictures, the face of a dark-haired beautiful girl, straight brows, dark eyes, the lips bent, a strong, square chin, hair parted, combed straight down and out at the chin-line. In the other picture, the girl's face was full of sadness beyond recall, and under the sorrow, there lurked a suggestion of great fear and great despair.

Shirley looked at the pictures carefully and then shook her head. "No." She handed them back to Burton.

"You say they're not you?"

"No, they're not."

"I think it's you," Burton said.

"Then you're wrong. I ~~ought to~~ know."

"Maybe."

"What do you ~~mean~~ maybe? It's like with my name.

I can't get a cop to believe that I know how to spell my name. Now I can't get a cop to believe that I know who I am."

"I believe you know who you are, Miss Campbel," Burton smiled. "But I also think that people forget times they were photographed."

"I'm not Elizabeth Taylor. I don't have my picture taken every day."

At that point, the officer who had brought in the basket returned and said to Burton that if he had finished with the stuff, they would like to process it. Burton put everything back into the wire basket except the two photos.

"I'll keep these for a while," he said.

Then he gave the officer a five-dollar bill and asked him to send up some coffee and sandwiches and Danish pastry. The officer left with the basket, and Burton explained to Shirley that he had to call his wife. "I'm supposed to be off duty at ten. It doesn't work out that way."

"No overtime either," Shirley nodded. "It's a ball to work for the city."

"It is," Burton smiled, and then he called his wife and argued with her and put down the phone with a bleak face. He shrugged and pushed the photos toward Shirley.

"I say they're you."

"You know something, Lieutenant—"

"No, but I'll listen."

"All right. Look at those pictures. I never been that sad—not once in all my life. I never had a reason to be that sad. Look at the other picture. I have never been that sad, because if I was, I guess I would have gone to the window and jumped or blown out my brains or something."

"You've contemplated that?"

"Who hasn't? I just haven't been worried enough to do any more than contemplate it."

"I see. And how do you account for the hairdo?" Burton asked. "You don't see many girls wearing their hair like that today. The kids tease their hair today. They build it up in a ball on top of the head or something like that—not parted the way your hair is and chin-length and combed straight."

"I like it that way," Shirley said. "So it's a coincidence."

"Why do you like it that way?"

"What is this? I got to tell you why I like my hair the way I comb it?"

"You don't have to, no. I'm just curious."

"All right. All right, Lieutenant—I'll tell you. You remember in *Life* magazine, they ran an article about how you tell the difference between a rich girl and a poor girl?"

"I remember."

"All right. I read that article, and all I could think was, Drop dead, the whole lot of you. I don't know why it rubbed me the wrong way. Maybe I'm a kind of professional poor girl. But one thing struck me—the way they comb their hair. They all wear their hair the same way. You remember?"

Burton nodded.

"So I said to myself, I'll fake them out, them and their big theories. What's to stop me from cutting my hair that way? So that's what I did. So I liked it. No pins, no curlers, no permanents, no teasing. I don't even have to go to the beauty parlor. I need it cut, my friend Cynthia, she takes a pair of scissors and cuts it. She thinks I'm nuts. She says to me, 'Shirley, you got to be out of your mind to wear your hair that way. What do you think people think when

they see you with your hair that way?" So I tell her, 'I know what they think. They think I'm a rich girl.' So she says that I should have my head examined if I think that anybody thinks that I'm a rich girl. All right. I like it this way. Sue me."

He was studying the pictures again as she finished, and he nodded, lifting his eyes and staring at her.

"You're an unusual woman, Miss Campbel."

"Come off it."

"Do you mind telling me where you were born?"

"All right. What else? The Bronx. April 7, 1942."

"Was your father's name Campbel? Did he spell it that way?"

"With the spelling again! What gives with you people? Look, I never seen my father, you understand? I only comb my hair this way, I didn't grow up this way. My mother says my father's name is Campbel. I'm using my mother's name which is Clark, and I decide to use my father's name, because it don't do a girl any good to walk around with her mother's maiden name. So I spell it wrong and it stays wrong—" Shirley's face was tight, her dark eyes narrow and sullen, and inside she was hating Burton and the room and everything that had ever happened to her.

She stood up suddenly. "I don't have to stand for this. I don't have to answer your questions. I came here of my own free will and told you what happened. Now I'm going home."

She rose and started toward the door. Burton's voice was surprisingly gentle as he said to her, "Please, Miss Campbel—wait a moment."

"For what?"

"You can't leave. Not yet."

"You mean you won't let me?"

"I'm afraid not."

Whirling on him, Shirley demanded, "Why? Why not? What did I do?"

"You killed two men," Burton sighed.

"What? Are you out of your mind? I never killed anybody—ever!"

"The two men in the car," Burton said.

"You're accusing me of killing them?" Shirley cried indignantly.

"You admitted it, Miss Campbel."

"What did I admit? Two hoodlums come to take me for a ride, and I try to stay alive, and you're calling me a murderer?"

"No. It's not murder, Miss Campbel. But it is manslaughter."

"And what's manslaughter?"

"Killing without premeditation—or in self-defense, or in an accident or a fight. I'm not saying that you're guilty of any crime or were even involved in a crime. But that's what I am trying to find out, and that's why you can't go."

Suddenly, Shirley was very hungry, and she found herself accepting a ham-and-cheese sandwich and a container of coffee.

"Only I'd rather think it was on City Hall than on you."

"I can afford it. They got money problems," Burton answered as she bit into the sandwich. Either it was very good or she was hungrier than she had thought.

"I know how they feel with that last-meal stuff," she mumbled, her mouth full of sandwich. "Tell me, Lieutenant, when did they last execute a woman in this state?"

"That's no way to talk or think."

"Well, how would you feel," Shirley asked, "if somebody just told you that you killed two men?"

"That's not to the point, Miss Campbel. I didn't say you committed a crime. I only want to find out why these two men were after you. And what made you think they were going to kill you?"

"Because they were killers."

"Have you ever known a killer?"

"Once is enough. It's like parachute jumping. You don't need to practice."

"Did you ever see either of them before?"

"Never."

"Were you ever mixed up in anything hot? I want you to tell me the truth."

"What's hot?"

"Dope, for example."

"You mean am I a junkie? The answer is no."

"Prostitution? Confidence?"

"That's a fine way to talk!" Shirley snapped.

"I have to ask the questions. Do you want some Danish pastry? I have plain and with prunes, so you have a choice."

"No, thank you. I got to watch my figure, even if I don't use it professionally."

"So do I. My wife says I'm getting fat as a house. And what it comes down to is coffee and Danish and peanuts. You watch, I'll eat both of these."

"You know," Shirley said, "you're not a bad guy for a cop, Lieutenant, but you got the disease of all cops. Everybody you talk to, they got to be a phony. Otherwise, why would you be talking to them? Well, let me tell you this,

I never took nothing from no one that I didn't pay whatever the price was. I made it the hard way, no matter how I comb my hair. My father walked out on my mother a month before I was born. I don't even know if they were married, and she hit her head against so many walls that she became a lush, God help her, so you can see what kind of a spoon I was born with in my mouth. But I made it, and nobody ever called me a whore. Not until today."

"Miss Campbel," Burton sighed, "I did not call you a whore nor was there any such implication. Not by any means. I'm just trying to get to the bottom of something." He pushed the photos toward her. "Look at these again, Miss Campbel. As far as I'm concerned, they're pictures of you."

Shirley looked at the pictures again. "As far as I'm concerned, they're not," she said.

"No doubts?"

"None."

"And as far as you know, you have never been mixed up in anything that could make people desire your death?"

"I have been out with some cookies," Shirley grinned, "the way they acted, they could desire it. But none of them had enough money to hire a car and two pros. No—I haven't any enemies, Lieutenant. Not that kind of enemies. Maybe I'm nobody, but whoever I know, I try to give them a square deal."

The phone rang and Burton picked it up, listened for a minute or so, and then asked, "Where are they? St. Vincent's? OK." He put down the phone and said to Shirley, "All right, Miss Campbel—I'm not going to make any charge and I'm not going to hold you. So as far as the

manslaughter thing is concerned, you can forget it for the time being."

With a sigh of relief, Shirley asked him what made him change his mind.

"I didn't really change my mind—it was just a technical point. Maybe you're holding back on me, maybe not. I think those are pictures of you. But maybe they're pictures of someone who looks that much like you. We'll go along with you for the time being, and see if we can track down someone who looks like those pictures. Meanwhile, we got a make on the little man in the car. That means an identification. His name is Francis Bannister, and he's wanted for armed robbery, murder and a few other things—in Detroit and Chicago. That helps your story, doesn't it?"

"It's still a story to you."

"Well, I don't know exactly what to make of it, Miss Campbel. The trouble is that there's no proof. There's no proof that you ever were in that car. You don't have a scratch on you, and that car was pretty badly smashed up from what I'm told. There's no proof that those two men wanted to kill you or threatened you. And there's no proof that these aren't photographs of you. We haven't identified the other man yet. Conceivably, he could be a friend of yours—carrying your picture on him."

"Conceivably he couldn't!" Shirley snorted.

"I'm not saying so. I'm simply pointing out that things could be that way. Personally, I am inclined to believe most of your story. Maybe when we start tracking down these pictures, I'll be ready to believe all of it. But I don't see that you have committed any crime that you should be held for."

"Thank you for nothing," Shirley said, standing up.

"My life is threatened, guns are poked into me, I am taken for a ride and come out of an auto crash alive by some miracle, and you tell me that you don't see that I have committed any crime. That's great. I will write Mayor Wagner a letter and suggest you for promotion. Can I go home now?"

"I'll take you home," Burton smiled. "But I'm afraid that you have to come with me to the morgue first. It's not a pleasant business, but we have to have a formal identification of the two men by you."

"Why?"

"Well, that's the way it works. You are the only one who can put them in the car with you, and it has to go on the record that way. It will only take a few minutes."

"I don't like morgues. I never was in one," Shirley protested.

"You're a strong girl, Miss Campbel, and your nerves seem to be pretty good. Actually, this is not the police morgue. The bodies are over at St. Vincent's, and I imagine they'll be down in pathology, waiting for autopsy."

"That's great," said Shirley. "That makes it just a picnic. I always liked pathology rooms, whatever they are."

Shirley found herself shivering as she stood with Burton in the Pathology Room of the hospital, while an attendant uncovered the faces of the two corpses. She fought against an inclination to be sick, as she nodded and whispered to Burton that these were the two men.

"All right. That's that," Burton said, and then he took her by the arm and led her out. When they were upstairs, in the main entranceway of the hospital, he said to her:

"Well, Shirley—you don't mind my calling you that?—what are we going to do about you?"

"Let me go to sleep. Even if a war starts tonight, I got to be up at seven in the morning. I work for a character called Mr. Morrow, and he would like to make a pass at me but can't get up enough nerve to do it, so he would like to fire me, and his assistant is Mr. Bergan who keeps making passes and doesn't get anywhere, so between the two of them it's like walking a tightrope. Still, it's what stands between me and the unemployment office, so what I need is a good night's sleep."

"It's just not as simple as that, Shirley."

"Nothing is simple. I want to go home, it's not as simple as that. I want a night's sleep, it's not as simple as that."

"Aren't you worried?"

"I'm tired."

"Look, my girl," Burton said to her, "either you're in some kind of big trouble or you look enough like someone who is to make it very uncomfortable for you."

"What do you want me to do?" Shirley sighed. "Put a cop outside my door? Does he follow me to work? Does he go and stand outside the john when I'm inside? Does he go dating with me?"

"It's not easy, is it?"

"All I want is to go to sleep, Lieutenant."

Detective Burton drove her home then.

3. The Bullfighter

Before he dropped her off in front of her house on Minetta Street, Burton said to Shirley, "If I were you, Shirley, I'd keep quiet about this for the time being. The newspapers have the story about the car, but we made nothing about the story of a girl running away from the car. It seems someone saw you, but now he's not convinced of what he saw. Do you want me to walk to your apartment with you?"

Shirley said, "No, I don't need anyone to walk upstairs with me. I got over being afraid of the dark when I was ten." Then she took a deep breath and said, "Maybe you'd better."

Burton went up the stairs with her, and when she opened her door, he went in first and prowled through her tiny apartment and peered into the closets.

"You might as well look under the bed," Shirley said.

He looked under the bed.

"I'm glad you take your work seriously. Now all I got to worry about are bad dreams."

"I think so. Lock your door, Shirley, and if anything suspicious happens, call me at the precinct. Or at home. Take down both numbers." She wrote down the numbers, and Burton said, "We'll be in touch."

When Burton left Shirley, he went back to his office and called Larry Cohen, who was an assistant district at-

torney for New York County. "Are you still awake?" he asked Cohen.

"If I wasn't, I am now."

"I want to see you," Burton said.

"Can't it wait for tomorrow?"

"No, it can't wait. I'll stop by on my way home. If I can work this late, you can survive a short visit."

At Cohen's apartment, Burton gave a short, succinct account of what had happened. "I'm not holding the girl," he said. "Do you agree?"

"If you believe her. I didn't talk to her."

"I think I believe her—as much as a cop can believe anyone." He took out the pictures and showed them to Cohen. "How about this?"

"That's a beautiful girl," Cohen said, "but unhappy."

"Did you ever see her before?" It was a shot in the dark, but it would become routine every time Burton showed the pictures to anyone.

"No—no, I don't think so. Still, there's something damn familiar about that face. Damn familiar."

Cohen, wrapped in a dressing gown and still not fully awake, blinked at Burton curiously. Then he took the picture from Burton, switched on another lamp and sat down in a chair where the full light of the lamp could fall upon the picture. He stared at it thoughtfully.

"What has this got to do with it?" he asked.

"What?"

"Come on, Lieutenant—it's bad enough that you wake me up in the middle of the night, don't play footsie with me. You come in here and tell me that a hired limousine, driven by two hoods, crashes on Nineteenth and Sixth,

and that both of them are dead and that it's even money they're murdered by a dame in the car—"

"Wait a minute, Larry," Burton interrupted, "I didn't say they were murdered. I said killed. And even then there's a real question to be answered."

"Killed. Murdered. It comes down to the same thing—"

"It does not, and as a lawyer, you should know that."

"I don't know a damn thing. I'm not even awake, to tell you the truth. I don't even know whether we're talking about attempted murder, kidnaping, murder, felonious assault, manslaughter, self-defense or what? You tell me that you had someone who claims to have caused this accident or whatever it was, and that you didn't even book her."

"Because there was no reason to book her."

"All right, Lieutenant—as you put it, she's just a kid from the Bronx, a hard-working, tough kid alone in the big city and trying to make both ends connect around the middle. So that's all I'm trying to do, and you shove this picture into my face. What about this picture? Whose picture is it?"

"Shirley Campbel's," Lieutenant Burton replied.

"What?"

"It's a picture of the kid who was supposedly in the car when it crashed," Burton said slowly and flatly.

"No."

"What do you mean, no?"

"No. You heard me, no. This is not a tough working girl from the Bronx. I don't say it's not her picture. You saw her, you saw this picture. So you can tell me that."

"I told you. It's her picture."

"All right, Lieutenant," Cohen said patiently. "You saw her. Does she wear her hair the same way?"

"That's right. She read an article about how a rich girl combs her hair."

"Bunk."

"She is also a speech expert," Burton sighed. "You're going to put me on that she's some kind of society kid out for kicks? No, Larry, it won't work. Even if she were Professor Higgins out of *My Fair Lady*, she would have to spend ten years in the Bronx to talk the way she talks. She is what she is, a tough, self-sufficient kid who lives alone on Minetta Street and works in the billing department of Bushwick Brothers, a plastic house on Houston Street. That's what she is and that's all she is."

"She is also someone who claims to have killed two men."

"So she claims. But it's not murder and I don't even know that it's manslaughter. If it's true."

"What do you mean, if it's true?"

"How do I know she's telling me the truth? How do I know she was ever in the car? Does her story hold water? Would it work? The man behind the wheel was an oversized hunk of meat and fat, two-fifty, maybe three hundred pounds. Can a kid who weighs no more than a hundred and fifteen, a hundred and twenty at the outside, put her foot down on his and force his foot down?"

"I don't know," Cohen smiled. "I never thought of it that way. Let's try it."

"How?"

"You're not skinny, Lieutenant."

"Thank you."

Cohen got up and pulled two small chairs together, placing them side by side. "Take the driver's seat, Lieutenant," he said.

"Don't be foolish, Larry."

"Ever a cop. It's no crime to think, even on the force."

"I love you," Burton said nastily, dropping his huge frame into one of the chairs. "God give me the day when they pull you into my precinct as a drunk."

"I'll mind where I drink."

He sat down next to Burton, who raised his toe and placed both hands on an imaginary wheel. As Cohen stamped down on his foot and Burton exclaimed in surprise and pain, Cohen's wife entered, sleepy, wrapped in a dressing gown and open-mouthed at the charade the two men were performing.

"Do you always play together at night when I'm asleep?" she asked them. "I remember a fairy tale about the princess who crept out of bed each night to go dancing underground, but it seems to me that you two have her beat by a long mile."

"Funny," Burton growled, rubbing his injured foot.

"Good evening, Lieutenant," Mrs. Cohen said. "Now that we're all wide awake and at play, can I make you some coffee?"

"I'm sorry," Cohen apologized to Burton.

"Coffee?"

"All right, coffee," Burton nodded. "Please excuse me, Mrs. Cohen. Your husband hates cops. I live in a world where everyone hates cops. When I was a kid, the head deacon of the church we belonged to was the most hated man in the neighborhood. Everyone despised him, the kids, the other deacons, the women's auxiliary, just everyone, and one night he was over to our house for a meeting, and my father said to him, 'Bert, what do they pay you to be

head deacon?" 'Pay me,' he said. 'By golly, they don't pay me a penny. I do it for the honor.'"

"I like you, Lieutenant," Mrs. Cohen smiled.

"Thank you. How much does Larry weigh?"

"One-seventy," Cohen said.

"One-eighty," his wife replied.

"Suppose you sit down here yourself and try it. I'm driving a car. My raised foot is supposed to be on the gas pedal. See if you can put my foot down."

"I'm delighted," said Mrs. Cohen. "It's nice to be waked up for games like this." She sat down, and the lieutenant's foot yielded under hers. "What do we play now?" she asked.

"So she could have been telling the truth," Burton said softly.

Shirley sat down on her bed, and sat there for a few minutes, not really thinking or doing anything at all, but just sitting there and shivering a little. It was just past midnight.

Then she went back to the door and checked the locks again, and then she went into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of tomato juice, and sipped at it and thought and wondered whether she should make some coffee. Coffee would keep her awake, but then she was not very certain that she wanted to sleep or could sleep. She felt resentful at Burton, the way he had walked out of the place and left her alone like this; but on the other hand, she didn't know what else he could have done. How can you stop people who want to kill you? The thought set her to shivering again, and then the phone rang.

A voice said to her in Spanish, "Is this you, my dear? Is this Miss Campbel?"

Shirley reached back through four years of high-school Spanish. She had been good at it. She reached back and sorted out the words in her mind. But she said nothing, and her hand holding the telephone shook a little.

In Spanish, "Are you there, Miss Campbel?"

"Yes," she whispered in English.

"Then you understand my Spanish?" the voice asked.

"Yes. I had high-school Spanish," she added, almost beligerently. "Four years of it," she said, still speaking English. "That's why I understand you, so just don't make anything out of it. Whoever you want, I'm not it—so just call off your hoodlums and leave me alone."

Still in Spanish, the man on the telephone said, "May I call you Carlotta and stop this nonsense?"

"No you may not!" Shirley shouted. "I'm not Carlotta or anybody else you know, and those are not my pictures, and that's that!"

"Four years of high-school Spanish," the voice said. "That is very droll. I remember that your mother always despised Spanish. It was French and English for both of you, and nothing else would do—"

"I am not Carlotta," Shirley insisted.

"Of course." Then, switching to English, a heavily accented English, the voice said, "What happens today, Miss Campbel—it is accident. Mistake. No more. So go to bed and sleep and about it, forget—forget, that is all."

"The pleasure is all mine," Shirley whispered, but the man on the wire had already cut off.

"No," Shirley told herself. "This can't go on. This is no

way for a girl to live. I could just as well be an airline hostess or something or one of those female astronauts."

Then she called Burton at the precinct. They gave her his home number and told her to call him there. He had just come in, as he told her, and then she related the substance of the telephone call.

"Carlotta?" he said. "Carlotta what?"

"I don't know."

"You're sure he spoke Spanish?"

"I'm sure," Shirley said. "What do I do now—jump out of the window and make it easy for them?"

"Make certain the door is locked and go to bed. Get some sleep."

"I'll sleep like a baby," Shirley replied bitterly.

Strangely enough, she did but by then it was two A.M. She pulled up the covers, curled under them and the next thing she knew, her alarm clock was announcing seven o'clock in the morning.

"Beautiful is as beautiful does," said Mr. Bergan as he stopped at Shirley's desk later that morning. "And you, my dear, you look like you didn't get your beauty sleep."

"Drop dead," Shirley sighed.

"What am I, my dear Shirley?" he begged her. "All I ask is what am I, my dear Shirley, to come in for this kind of treatment?"

"Loathsome," said Shirley.

"You know what makes ninety-nine percent of the trouble in this world? You know what makes wars and catastrophes and similar situations? You know why one half of this world is screaming at the other half?"

"You tell me," Shirley said, her fingers working independently at the machine.

"Rejection. Plain, simple rejection. All you got to have is a cursory knowledge of Freud to realize what rejection does to people. Take me, for example. Here I am, tall, handsome, a graduate of Brooklyn College, a gentleman in every fiber of my being, thirty years old—"

"What happened to the card for Ginsberg Novelties?" Shirley interrupted him. "You were going to have it punched. Do you know, as long as I have been here, we have never been able to send an intelligent bill to Ginsberg Novelties. Either the address is wrong or the amount is wrong or both are wrong."

"Is that all I mean to you—a punched card?"

"Here comes Mr. Morrow," Shirley said.

At noontime, Cynthia Kugelman told Shirley that in her opinion, Mr. Bergan was serious, because he had stopped at her desk and made inquiries concerning Shirley's family.

"In my opinion," Cynthia said, "that is the first sign of a serious approach. As soon as they want to know about your pedigree, it's a change of pace, if you follow me."

"I've got a pedigree to end all pedigrees," Shirley agreed. "Look, let's have lunch alone, because I got something so secret, if I don't tell you about it, I'm going to burst. I am also nervous."

"You're not the nervous type," said Cynthia. She was tall and slim, and for the last month, her hair had been blond. Shirley thought it was the best color she had ever tried, and insisted that she keep it that way.

"I'm the nervous type, not you," Cynthia went on. "That's what my dates always say, that I'm the nervous

type. I tell them I'm sensitive, they say, no, I'm nervous. But you?"

"Just wait," Shirley promised.

Downstairs, in front of the building, Mr. Bergan intercepted them and said that he would be honored to purchase lunch for both of them.

"Another time," Shirley smiled.

"You're not sick?"

"Do I look sick?"

"You smiled at me," Mr. Bergan said.

"Drop dead," said Shirley.

"You can tell about the change of pace, can't you?" Cynthia said, as they walked down Houston Street.

"Maybe. Only," Shirley reflected, "it's strange how unimportant men who want to date you become when you get mixed up with men who want to kill you."

"That's the way men are," Cynthia shrugged. "You can't live without them and you can't live with them."

But when, at Kaplan's Delicatessen Grill and Restaurant, over hot cornbeef sandwiches and celery tonic, Shirley told her the whole story of the night before, Cynthia found herself at a loss for words—and sat silent and pale, staring at Shirley. Shirley finished the cornbeef sandwich, coleslaw on the side, and the french-fried potatoes.

Finally, Cynthia whispered, "And you just sit there and eat—"

"I'm hungry," Shirley said. "But you know, I don't think it's nourishing the way we eat, one day pizza, the next day cornbeef with coleslaw and fried potatoes on the side. The trouble is, whenever I think of what I want to eat, it's a cornbeef sandwich. Or pizza. So it comes to the same thing."

"How can you sit there and talk about food?"

"What's wrong with talking about food?"

"But what are you going to do?" Cynthia pleaded.

"Nothing."

"You mean you're just going to sit there and let them kill you?"

"The whole point is, Cynthia, that they're making a mistake. They don't want to kill me. They want to kill somebody else."

"Great! Oh, yes, that's just great! So you get a special funeral because you're a mistake."

"Well, what should I do?"

"I just think that the last thing in the world you should do is sit here and talk about food. So it's going to cut five years off your life to eat pizza and cornbeef. But it seems to me that it's just as plain as the nose on your face that these creeps have every intention of cutting a lot more than five years off your life."

"That's very true," Shirley agreed somberly.

"So do something about it!"

"What?"

"What? What? Don't keep saying that. Let them know that they're making a mistake."

"Who?"

"Who? The creeps who are trying to kill you."

Shirley smiled sheepishly and felt the way she was smiling. Indignantly, Cynthia pointed out that it was a big joke—and she was so intent and disturbed that Shirley found herself feeling sorry for Cynthia.

"Poor Cynthia," she found herself saying to herself, "poor Cynthia," and then she said aloud, "I don't know them—that's the whole trouble. I don't know who's trying

to kill me or why. All I know is that the kind of picture, you know, you know, where the husband is making all these fancy plans to kill the wife or to drive her crazy or something, and you sit in the movie house smirking with pleasure, with maybe just a little bit of a chill, because you know about this cop from Scotland Yard and that he's going to turn up at the right moment—well, that's the kind of a picture I'm not watching any more."

"That's it—the cop," Cynthia cried. "What's his name—" "Burton."

"Right, Burton. Well, just let me tell you, honey, it's his duty to protect you. That's what we pay him for."

"Cynthia, honey, use your head," Shirley told her. "How can he protect me?"

"How? He's only got twenty, twenty-five thousand cops, that's all."

"He doesn't have them. He's just a lieutenant of detectives."

"So who's got them? He should have a guard around you day and night."

"That would be fine," Shirley sighed. "That would be just fine—I live out the rest of my life with cops all around me. I could even marry one, maybe, if I'm lucky. There's just one catch. I don't think he believes me. I don't think he can make up his mind about whether I'm some kind of nut or something. Even last night with the telephone call, I'm not sure he believed me. I read an article once about how when there's a crime or a murder or something, all kinds of nuts come running to the cops to confess doing it."

"What about the pictures?" Cynthia demanded.

"That makes him wonder," Shirley admitted. "I'll bet

even he has a hard time figuring out how those pictures got into the fat man's wallet. He still doesn't believe they're not pictures of me."

"Are they?"

"I just don't know any more," Shirley said.

In the afternoon, Mr. Bergan stopped at her desk and said, "Shirley, can you talk seriously, maybe for one minute?"

It indicated a change of pace, and it occurred to Shirley that you don't tell someone to drop dead when he approaches you with serious intentions, regardless of what your feelings toward him may be; and she began to frame in her mind some such thing as this, "I appreciate your intentions, Mr. Bergan, and I am very considerably honored, believe me, but the truth is that such a thing never entered my mind. I have just never felt that way toward you, and it seems to me that unless a girl has such feelings to begin with, what they call an electric response of sympathy, it is just a waste of time to pursue the matter and can only lead to bruised feelings on both sides."

She considered that she had composed it very nicely, and was about to test its effect on Mr. Bergan, when she realized that the subject of his conversation was in another direction entirely.

"It's about something that happened right before you came back from lunch. You don't know a bullfighter, do you?"

For once in her life, Shirley was speechless; but after several empty swallows, she managed to reply that so far as she could recollect, she didn't know any bullfighters.

"Oh? This one asked a lot of questions about you."

"Who?"

"The bullfighter," Mr. Bergan answered feebly.

"I don't know what you're talking about, really, Mr. Bergan," Shirley said. "What bullfighter? I told you I don't know any bullfighters."

"Well, this guy was around asking questions about you, and it just occurred to me that he was a bullfighter."

"What? You mean he was wearing one of those silk suits with the red capes?"

"No, no, no. He was wearing a black suit, but it fit him tight as a glove. It was just something about the way he talked and acted and the way his hair was cut that made me think about a bullfighter. Do you remember the way Tyrone Power looked, with the long sideburns—?"

"Did he have a Spanish accent?" Shirley interrupted.

"How did you know?"

"It's par for the course with bullfighters. What else? What kind of questions did he ask?"

"When you came here? Where you were born? How old you are? Do you speak Spanish?"

"You know something about New York," Shirley sighed. "You only stay here long enough, you see everything. What did you tell him?"

"I told him to go to hell," Mr. Bergan answered with dignity. "Do you know him, Shirley? I didn't like his looks one bit. Who was he?"

"A bullfighter," Shirley replied. "What else?"

At five o'clock, Cynthia said that she would walk Shirley home. She said that it was the very least a friend could do for a friend. "You're out of your mind," Shirley told her, but Cynthia insisted.

"It's not that I don't appreciate it," Shirley said, "but walking me home is like walking home an ex-member of the Mafia who ran off at the mouth in front of a congressional committee. It's not that I don't appreciate it, not at all, only you should have your head examined."

Mr. Bergan appeared at that moment, and caught the last few words. "Something goes on with you two," he said. "I got a broad back. Why don't you put your troubles there?"

"After hours," Shirley replied, "I leave my troubles with my psychiatrist. What do you think I pay twenty-five dollars an hour for?"

"Always a wisecrack," he said sadly. "You would think friends grow on trees. But let me tell you one thing, statistically speaking, there are one and three-eighths women in this country for every available man. At least that puts me in a buyer's market."

"So go buy," Shirley said, and led Cynthia off, and then felt miserable and guilty when Cynthia pointed out that all Mr. Bergan desired was to be of some assistance.

"Don't you think we need assistance?" she asked Shirley accusingly. "And do you know something, he's kind of good-looking in a certain way. Also, he's tall."

"So are trees."

"What?"

"Tall. Oh, for God's sake, Cynthia, I am upset. I don't mean to be like that. It's just that Mr. Bergan brings out the worst in me. I don't really mean it. In some ways, he's very nice."

"It seems very ironic to think about doom in the spring," Cynthia sighed.

Shirley knew exactly what she meant. In spite of the

fact that April showers are a calendar obligation, there had been day after day of bright, sunny weather; and on this late afternoon, the city was bathed in a golden glow. People ambled along with a sort of tired but relaxed satisfaction, and even the stream of trucks that thundered down Houston Street appeared to move more slowly, more elegantly. The city was so pleasant, the evening breeze so cool that Shirley felt that her heart was as heavy as lead in contrast.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Cynthia.

"You know something, I was just thinking about the kind of date I would like to have tonight, if I had a date—"

"I got news for you," said Cynthia, "the last thing in the world to be on your mind should be a date. You know what I think?"

"What?"

"You should disappear," Cynthia declared.

"You're out of your mind."

"Absolutely, you should disappear. You're not around, they can't kill you. That makes sense."

"Nobody disappears," Shirley answered impatiently.

"No? How about Judge Crater?"

"Who was Judge Crater?"

"Somebody who disappeared. As a matter of fact, it's a classical case of somebody disappearing. So don't tell me nobody disappears."

"For heaven's sake, Cynthia, where can I disappear to?"

"You can move in with me for a while," Cynthia offered generously.

"Thank you. That's really disappearing. Except when we come to work together each morning at nine."

"Maybe you'll have to give up the job."

"That's fine. So then I only starve to death." Shirley

walked on in silence for a while, and then she said, "You know, Cynthia, I am beginning to be very annoyed about all this."

At the door of Shirley's house, Cynthia said good night and warned Shirley not only to lock her door, but to wedge a chair under the doorknob.

"I know about that, that it's not just something out of the movies, but it works," said Cynthia, "because my Aunt Anna and my Uncle Frederick, they were always having the most terrible kind of fight, only it was my Aunt Anna who was twice his size, she was always pushing him around. So one night, he goes into the bedroom and wedges a chair under the knob, and he tells her he ain't coming out for maybe a week. You know they had to take the door off the hinges. Anyway, good night," Cynthia finished, "and for God's sake, be careful."

It occurred to Shirley that she could invite Cynthia upstairs with her, to share cornbeef hash and eggs. Formerly, she had often felt that Cynthia had a tendency to run over at the mouth, yet tonight she could imagine nothing cozier than to have Cynthia fill in all the loopholes in the relationship of her Aunt Anna and her Uncle Frederick, what their fights were about, how long he had remained in the room once he was in there and what happened after they took the door off the hinges and rooted him out. Yet Shirley was possessed of a strong and insistent streak of fair-mindedness, and she had to admit to herself that to invite Cynthia upstairs with her was not unlike inviting a feckless child to amuse himself with a box of matches. Reluctantly but firmly, she said good-night and went up the outside stairs into the hallway.

There were no apartments on the ground floor of the old city house in which Shirley lived. When the house had been converted into apartments, back in the 1930s, two stores had been built on the ground floor. Thus, when one entered from the street, there was only the long, narrow, blank hallway, divided halfway down its thirty-five feet of length by a staircase rising to the second floor, and lit by a single bulb in the ceiling.

Shirley entered and closed the outside door behind her, took three or four steps toward the staircase and then sensed that she was not alone—a sensation of closeness, breathing and soft motion. She remembered reading something once about a person who was injected with a strong drug and felt it course through her body. In a similar manner, she felt fear surge through her, race down her spine and reach out to every extremity of her person, and caught with fear, choking with it, she sucked in air deeply, gaspingly, her stomach rising and falling, her chest expanding. It lasted only a moment. She was controlling herself again when the man stepped out from behind the staircase.

"Buenas noches, Señorita Carlotta," he said softly.

Shirley could see why Mr. Bergan had called him a bullfighter. He had the lean, nervous, tense stance of a bullfighter. He was small, no taller than Shirley, very slim, and the trousers of his black suit were cut almost as tight as leotards. He wore a white shirt with a yellow tie, and his black hair was full and long, his sideburns low almost to the lobes of his ears. He had black eyes, a sallow complexion, and a switch-blade knife in his right hand. The blade of the knife was at least seven inches long.

He balanced on the balls of his feet, swaying slightly

from side to side, and then he came toward Shirley with small, mincing steps.

"Crazy," thought Shirley, her heart pounding, but her thoughts racing even faster, "crazy and sick and way, way out. He's full of stuff and flying with it, so no sudden movements. Don't turn your back, Shirley, for God's sake, don't turn your back. Don't panic. Don't run."

"I'm not Carlotta!" she snapped, speaking English. "Stupid! You're stupid! Look at me! Am I Carlotta?"

He paused in his forward motion and grinned, a thin, humorless smile. "*De veras?*" he asked, his thin, pink tongue flickering over his narrow lips. "*Me alegre.*" He was glad. In English, he said, "No matter—I never see Señorita Carlotta. Who the hell care!"

"I care!" Shirley cried.

"So? Soon, you don't care, hey?"

"Pig!" Shirley spat on the floor in front of her. "What do you do, kill women for hire? I've seen better than you hooked to the rack in the pork store!"

"Crawl, lady," he grinned.

"For you? Come—let's see how you kill a woman!"

"I hate woman. I hate you."

"*Cobarde*," Shirley whispered. "I'm glad I remember that word—hey, coward—coward—yellow dog!" He began to sway again, the knife blade trembling. "Bullfighter, someone called you today. You hear that, *cobarde*? What a laugh! You're no bullfighter—" She heard the door flung open behind her, and cried out, as the man thrust the knife forward and flung himself at her, "You're a dirty street dog!"

She leaped aside, and behind her a gun went off, and the small man stopped in his plunge, hung swaying on a non-

existent hook, dropped the knife and then went down on his knees, his left hand pressed to his right shoulder. Then, as he reached for the knife with his left hand, Burton swept by Shirley and kicked him in the face. He went over and slid down the smooth tile of the hallway like a bowling pin.

He lay there, his eyes closed now, blood wetting his black suit with a deeper stain. Burton picked up the knife, and as he turned to Shirley, she said, "You didn't have to kick him like that. He's half your size. Always the cop first. I bet you're real proud."

Burton, silent for a long moment, panting, finally said, "I'll be damned."

4. The Prince

After the ambulance had come and had taken the bull-fighter to St. Vincent's Hospital, and after order had been restored on Minetta Street and the crowd dispersed, Detective Burton walked up two flights of stairs and knocked on the door of Shirley's apartment. Even through the closed door, he could smell the enticing odor of cornbeef hash being browned in the pan. He waited while something was dragged and pushed aside, and then Shirley let him in.

"It's you," she said. "Well, I had a chair wedged under the door handle."

"And what made you think of that brilliant notion?" Burton asked with some irritation.

"It's not a brilliant notion and I did not think of it. It just happens that my girl friend, Cynthia Kugelman, has an Aunt Anna and an Uncle Frederick who fight all the time. That's all."

"That's all?"

"Exactly. Is he going to live—or are you like Matt Dillon or some kind of executioner or something?"

"He was trying to kill you," Burton said. "Can't you get that through your head?"

"Everybody's trying to kill somebody," Shirley replied, going into the tiny kitchen to look at the cornbeef hash. "It's like a jungle, only worse. Does that give you a license

to go around shooting at everything you see? Cops are all the same. Are you hungry?"

As with others who knew Shirley, Burton found himself ill-equipped to deal with her practice of combining several tangential ideas in a single uninterrupted flow of words. He merely stared at her and ventured the opinion that she was a remarkable young woman.

"Thank you. So write me a letter of recommendation to Bushwick Brothers, they shouldn't fire me when they find out I'm being chased by delinquents in tight pants and switch-blades. And furthermore, don't think he would have killed me if you hadn't shot him. He wasn't any bigger than I am, and he was shaking so much he almost dropped the knife. And furthermore, I am sick and tired of this whole thing."

"I appreciate that," Burton said sourly.

"Are you hungry?"

"No."

"Well, did you eat dinner?"

"No."

"Don't you feel good? You should have an appetite."

"I have an appetite. I will make myself plain, Miss Campbel. I have an appetite, but I also promised my wife that for once this week I would be home for dinner. Therefore, I am going to be home for dinner if it is humanly possible. Do you understand?"

"My God," Shirley said, "you talk like I'm trying to kidnap you or make a pass at you. Please rest assured, Lieutenant, that I don't make a practice of making passes at men twice my age. Also, I am the last person in the world to prevent you from going home and having dinner with your wife."

"All right. The point is that you are going to remain right here in this apartment, with the door locked and with a chair wedged under the door handle, if you so desire—and you are not to set foot out of this place until I return."

"Oh? All of a sudden we have totalitarianism. Since when are you supposed to tell me where I stay and where I go?"

"Since right now. What do I have to do—take you with me and lock you up in a cell?"

"I like that! For what?"

"For my own peace of mind. Maybe it would be the best thing to do at that."

"OK," Shirley sighed. "What do I do?"

"Stay right here until I come back."

"When will that be?"

"I don't know—but before midnight. Pack a suitcase with whatever you need for a few days, and meanwhile I'll see what kind of arrangements I can make and what we can get out of the knife boy. If it makes you happy, he'll live."

"I'm glad. What kind of arrangements are you going to make?"

"I don't know. Maybe we'll put you in a hotel where we can keep an eye on you—or maybe a cell. I think the cell would be better."

"Big joke," said Shirley. "There's nothing as wonderful as a cop's sense of humor."

Only, after Burton had left, it occurred to Shirley that he might well have been quite serious, and that from here, her next stop would be a cell. She looked around her

apartment, and decided that never before had it looked as warm and snug and comfortable as it did right now, even allowing for the fact that one of the kitchen chairs was wedged under the doorknob.

The apartment was the story of Shirley's life and the culmination of her life. It marked each step upward in her struggle for existence, and it underlined her independence and her taste and her stability. The simple, effective lines of the inexpensive modern furniture, the bright, boldly chosen colors, the prints on the walls—all of these were as revealing as a book about Shirley would have been. The net effect was bold, unblushing innocence and comfort as well, and the thought of leaving it for a cell brought her as close to tears as she had ever been.

She stood in the kitchen now, regarding the well-browned cornbeef hash without enthusiasm, and then she turned off the light under the pan. Anyway, she was not hungry, and she hated to eat alone, and she was as bored with cornbeef hash as she was with cornbeef sandwiches and pizza pie. She was bored and unhappy and irritated that a series of lunatic events should choose her as the center of attention, and at this point she was too provoked to be afraid. So provoked, indeed, that when the doorbell rang, she strode over to it and snapped:

"What now?"

Her first thought was that Burton had returned, and she was framing a proper and sufficiently caustic greeting for him when the doorbell rang again.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Please, Miss Campbel, may I come in?" a young, respectful, nervous voice inquired. The voice had an English accent, and Shirley, like so many other Americans, had

admiration and the highest regard for an English accent. No matter what role a British actor played, Shirley could never actually dislike him. An English accent automatically evoked trust. She and Cynthia had once double-dated with two British sailors, whom they met at the cafeteria at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Shirley had been of the opinion that she and Cynthia were going a little too far by allowing themselves to be picked up, especially by sailors, but Cynthia held that something that happened in a museum could hardly be called a pickup—and it turned out that the two boys were very polite and the evening fairly pleasant. It confirmed Shirley's feelings that people who talked this way were of necessity reliable characters; but tonight she was none too quick about opening the door, and demanded to know who this person on the other side of the door was and what he wanted.

"I must talk to you," he said. "You wouldn't know who I am, but I take my oath that I mean you no harm. I know you're in very great danger, but so am I, believe me."

"There's a cop outside, so how did you get in?"

"I was in. I was on the floor above. I came here with Seppi, the man who was shot. Please let me in. It's dangerous for me to stand out here on the landing."

"Dangerous for you? I assure you, Buster, the way things have been happening, it's a lot more dangerous for me to open this door. I'd like to help you, but I can't. So beat it."

"Please," the voice begged her. The voice was defeated and afraid—more afraid than Shirley had been since it started. That was the only explanation Shirley could offer herself as to why she opened the door. She couldn't be

afraid of anything so frightened and forlorn as that voice; but though she felt that, the actuality went deeper. There are people who can live behind locks and with an injunction against opening doors; Shirley was not among them. It was her door, she would have said.

She opened the door then, and a boy came into the room, and then she locked the door behind him with the assurance that this was no one to be afraid of. Fear was too much a part of him. She wedged the chair back under the doorknob, faced the young man and said to him firmly:

"Now suppose you just tell me how you come to be upstairs with that juvenile delinquent bullfighter downstairs—and just what is the connection between the two of you?"

He stared at her, and shook his head. He was slender, fair and tall, and no more than twenty-two or twenty-three years old, if that; Shirley would have guessed closer to twenty-one. He had sandy hair, blue eyes, a long, straight nose and a nice mouth. At least, that was Shirley's definition for his mouth; she put great store in mouths. She didn't have to think about people any more than she did about dresses, pictures, books or cops. Either she liked them or she did not like them, and she liked this boy, admitting that he wanted some stiffening. He was scared, and she tended to be impatient with people who were scared, and she told him that he was safe now, the door locked behind him, and that he might just as well relax. He continued to stare at her, his look including amazement, disbelief and worry.

"Well," Shirley said, "I suppose I should be flattered.

I still want to know your connection with that half-witted bullfighter?"

"Who?"

"Seppi, you called him."

"Oh. Seppi."

"That's right, Seppi."

"He brought me here."

"That's no recommendation," said Shirley. "Where I come from, they judge people by the company they keep."

"He's no friend of mine," the boy protested.

"That speaks for your character. Why did he bring you here?"

"To look at you, I think. I didn't know he would try to kill you. He did, didn't he?"

"Kill me? No, not yet," Shirley smiled. She had to smile at the boy. He was terribly serious—frightened and intent and serious—and she couldn't help thinking how lovely his speech was.

"I meant—didn't he try?"

"You might say so," Shirley agreed.

"I didn't know he would try. I mean, I knew that they would, if they were pressed—"

"They would what?" Shirley asked.

"Kill you. I mean, they're going to kill me too. I'm not sure that Seppi wasn't meant to. But they wanted me to look at you first and make sure—if you follow me?"

"Like you were a seeing-eye dog."

"Oh?"

"They're going to kill me—they're going to kill you. Like in those Hollywood pictures where everybody punches. You say two words and they punch. Here they

kill. What have they got against you and me? Or is it the whole human race?"

"Just you and me." He managed to smile. He seemed to have a pleasant smile, but Shirley was not completely sure. The smile was too quick—too eager.

"That's a comfort. I still don't know what you were doing upstairs. Where upstairs? You got friends in this building?"

"I was on the landing upstairs. Seppi told me to stay there. He said he'd call me when he stopped you."

"And you stayed," Shirley said, less with contempt than with amazement.

"Where could I go? Seppi was downstairs. Is he dead?"

"Why are you so afraid of him?"

"Wouldn't you be afraid of someone who could kill you any moment—any time?"

"I'll tell you something," Shirley said. "There was a heavyweight fighter called Joe Louis. Maybe you heard of him?"

The boy shook his head.

"Well, this Joe Louis was a colored man, and when his first big fight came up, the manager of the boy he was fighting came into his dressing room and began to tell Joe Louis how his boy would do this and that and everything else to Louis. So Louis listened for a while, and then he said, 'Mister, while your boy is doing all that to me, what do you suppose I'm going to be doing?' "

The boy thought about it for a moment, and then he said, "I'm not much good for fighting, Miss Campbell. Is Seppi dead?"

"He's not dead, no. but before a cop called Burton gets through with him, he's going to wish he's dead. Anyway,

his right shoulder is all smashed up, and it's going to be a long time before he gets to playing with knives again, even if they ever let him out of jail."

"Thank God," the boy whispered.

"Good. Now can you relax for a little while without thinking about being killed?"

"No." The boy shook his head. "They will kill me in any case. There's no way out of that, really. Only it won't be Seppi and that knife of his. God, I was so afraid of that knife of his—"

"Why do you keep looking at me that way?" Shirley asked, thinking that the subject of how soon he was going to be killed would profit neither of them.

"Because you look so much like her. And then you don't. You're better-looking than she is, really you are."

"Who is she?" Shirley asked.

"My cousin Carlotta. She's dead, you know. I told them that, but they wouldn't believe me."

"Sit down," Shirley said. He did so obediently, never taking his eyes off her face. "Now," said Shirley, "we will take it from the top, clean and sweet."

"Oh?"

"From the top."

"I don't quite understand," he replied, shaking his head.

"No, of course not. Only tell me one thing. You talk English like Laurence Olivier, but nothing I say seems to register. What is it? Do I have a talent for confusion?"

"No. Oh, no. Nothing of that sort, really. I think you're quite wonderful."

"Why?" Shirley asked bluntly.

"Well, really—I don't know. Simply the way you are."

The way you talk. The way you react to me—well, to everything.”

“I’m wonderful, but I can’t make myself clear—is that it, Buster?”

“No. The fault is mine, you see. I was educated in England. That obscures some of your expressions. When you said, take it from the top—”

“That means we start at the beginning,” Shirley said patiently. “I ask some questions, and you answer them.”

“Of course,” he said eagerly. “If I can.”

“Like so. Who are you? Where do you come from? Who untied you and told you to run loose? Where is your mother and why did she abandon you? Who wants to kill you and who wants to kill me? Who is this creep Seppi? And who were those poor idiots who stopped by last night with the big black car. That’s for a beginning. Afterwards, you can tell me who Carlotta is and why her picture was in Fatty’s pocket. Also, what is your name and are you hungry?”

His smile was better now. It lit up his whole face, and it occurred to Shirley that she had never seen a face that was quite as ingenuous, open and defenseless.

“If I may begin at the end,” he said, ‘I’m very hungry. They had me locked up for three days. I had a sandwich this morning—but nothing since then.”

“Do you like cornbeef hash?”

“I’ve never tried it, but I’m sure I would like it.”

“All right—hash, eggs, frozen french-fries, which you don’t eat frozen, in case you haven’t run into them before, but I warm them first, and milk and bread. As a nutritionist, I leave something to be desired, but I guess it’s better than pizza pie. What’s your name?”

"Jimmy."

"Jimmy what?"

"Well, Miss Campbel, my full name is James Charles Alexander de Montort de Bernard, but it's a rather long name, isn't it?"

"It's a long name," Shirley agreed, studying him dubiously. "We'll settle for Jimmy. Look, I don't know whether my kitchen has a living room or my living room has a kitchen. You're in one, you're in the other. So you just sit where you are, and we'll talk while I get things ready."

"Can't I help you?"

"Just sit where you are and get your breath back," Shirley told him. "I'm already too damned efficient for my own good." She lit a flame under the cornbeef hash and took out her large frying pan for the eggs and started it heating. Five eggs, she decided, three for him and a pair for herself. Now that she didn't have to eat alone, her appetite was returning. It was true that James Charles Alexander had that half-starved look about him, but in Shirley's experience, this was the type that frequently came up with a bottomless pit where the stomach should properly be. She observed the motherly approach in herself, and found that it irritated her. The last thing in the world that any man had ever accused her of was a motherly attitude.

"Thank you," said James Charles. "It's very good of you. I don't know how you could be so casual about it?"

"About what?"

"Myself," said James Charles. "You don't really know me."

"You're hungry," Shirley shrugged. "Even if you are a louse, you are still hungry."

"You're pulling my leg now."

"Sure, I'm pulling your leg," Shirley said. "How do you like your eggs—soft or hard, turned or sunny side up?"

Shirley had emptied her own plate, and she sat back and smoked a cigarette and watched James Charles finish the loaf of white bread with his third glass of milk. When she suggested more eggs, he shook his head and apologized for making a pig of himself.

"If I could stay as skinny as you and eat like that, I'd do the same, James Charles, believe me."

"You don't have to call me James Charles."

"I'm leaving off the Alexander."

"I see."

"That's a sort of a joke," Shirley said. "It's not really funny, just an attempt to be funny. It's a character defect of mine. Some girls cry. I try to be a female Danny Kaye. You heard of Danny Kaye?"

"Oh yes—in the cinema?"

"That's right. In the cinema. He gets more laughs than Joe Louis."

"Oh? But you said Joe Louis was a boxer?"

Shirley started to say, "Drop dead," swallowed her words and said instead, "Don't trouble yourself about that. We got all those questions to answer."

"Yes, of course. I'm still amazed at the way you are, because you don't really know me, do you? I mean, I could be like Seppi—one of them."

"You mean a killer?"

He nodded seriously. Shirley nodded just as seriously and said that she would take her chances.

"It's very decent of you," he said. "Please believe me, Miss Campbel. I'm not one of them."

"I believe you. That makes you happy? All right—now suppose you tell me who you are and what you are. You're English, aren't you?"

"No. I was educated in England, but I'm not English. I come from a place called Montort. You've heard of it?"

Shirley shook her head and said that now they could start clean. "We balance Joe Louis and Minetta Street with Montort. Where is it?"

"Well, it's in Spain, so as to speak—but not really. I mean just as a location. One small section of the border touches France. It's in the Pyrenees, so that places it on the northern border of Spain and just south of France."

"And what is it?" Shirley asked.

"What is it? I don't understand."

"A city, a village—what?"

"I see what you mean." He smiled almost apologetically. "No, it's a country. Or was. A very small country, by your standards. It occupies a single valley, seven and a half miles at its longest point and five miles at its widest. So that would give it a land area a little less than twice your Manhattan Island—not very large, you see. In precise terms, it should be called a principality, since it was recognized as such originally by Henry of Navarre, who placed it under his protection and included it as royal fief."

"And exactly what is a principality?" Shirley asked.

"Simply a place that's governed by a prince—in the old-fashioned usage."

"And that's where you come from?"

"That's where I come from," he nodded.

"And what are you? Why is it important to kill you? Why are they giving me such a rough time because I look like your cousin Carlotta? What have you done?"

"It's not so much what I've done as what I am," James Charles said. "I'm the last surviving member of my family, the Bernards. I'm the hereditary prince."

"You're the hereditary prince," Shirley said.

"That's right," he nodded sadly. "I'm the prince—or the prince-pretender, to put it correctly. I don't have a penny to my name. I own the clothes on my back, no more, and I have only an outside chance of living through the next twenty-four hours. But I'm the prince."

"I'm listening," Shirley said.

"It's a long and not very pleasant story, if you want to hear it?"

"I do want to hear it," Shirley said. "I can't think of anything else I want to hear as much. In fact, it will do you good to listen too."

Watching him carefully, she put out her cigarette and considered the whole question before she decided to put the dishes in the sink.

"It doesn't figure, a prince sitting in a kitchen. Not one as small as this, anyway I can see one of them big castle kitchens, like they always have in *The Three Musketeers*, so they can fight across the table. Did you live in a castle?" She was clearing the table as she spoke.

"Never been in one. I'm a sort of a bargain-basement prince, you see. I hope you believe me?"

"At this point, I'm ready to believe anything, James Charles. Anything at all."

"You don't have to call me James Charles, Miss Campbell. No one ever did."

"You don't have to call me Miss Campbell. You know, it's spelled with one L. C-a-m-p-b-e-l. Do you mind?"

"No, not at all."

"That's good. You know, you're awful polite, even for a prince. Well, my name's Shirley. When anyone asks me how is that, I tell them it's a generic name in the part of the Bronx I come from. That proves I'm not uneducated, only ignorant, and I don't often get frazzled like this, except when I'm sitting with a prince. That only happens on off weeks. So you call me Shirley, and I'll call you Jimmy. Now go into the living room and sit in the armchair. It took me twenty-two weeks to pay off that armchair, and every time I made a payment, I asked myself what on earth I needed it for. Now I got the answer. I needed it for visiting princes. I'll finish cleaning the table."

She wiped the table clean and then went into the living room and asked him whether he smoked. He shook his head.

"My friend Cynthia," Shirley said, "she'll chop my head off because I don't call you Your Highness. On such questions, my friend Cynthia is very formal. I'm different, I guess I suffer from some kind of mental latitude or lassitude, I guess. Maybe from both." She curled up on the couch and nodded. "Go ahead. I'm listening."

"I'll try to tell it so it makes sense, Miss Campbell—"

"Call me Shirley. I'll call you Prince."

"Shirley. I think it's a rather nice name, you know. Well—I was born in Montort, but I haven't any memories of it. I don't know any more about what it's really like than you do. You see, I was born in 1911, soon after the end of the

Spanish Civil War, and when I was three months old, my mother took me to England. Do you know much about the Spanish Civil War?"

Shirley shook her head, watching the prince intently.

"Well, it was a long, complex affair, and we haven't time to go into it. Sufficient to say, it was the worst and bloodiest thing that ever happened to Spain, and Spain has never been a stranger to bad things or bloodshed. Through the course of the war, my father remained neutral. There was nothing else he could do. He had no army in Montort, no defenses of any kind, only a single constable who would take care of things if some of the villagers had too much of a Saturday night and disturbed the peace. The entire population was less than nine hundred, most of them peasants who had not altered their way of living very much in the past thousand years. So he remained neutral. At least until the end of the war. Then Franco was victorious, and remnants of the Republican troops were attempting to escape across the Pyrenees into France. Some of them were wounded and others sick and exhausted, and it meant death if they fell into the hands of the Falange. My father would have had a heart of stone to turn them away. He didn't have a heart of stone. He had a very kind heart, as I am told—you see, I never saw him.

"Well, he sheltered as many as he could, cared for them and then let them cross the border into France without returning to Spain. I told you, I think, that about a mile of the border touched French soil. I guess my father's sympathies were always with the Republican side—but doing this, he earned the undying enmity of Franco. He knew it was only a matter of time before something happened, and as soon as I was old enough to be moved—I was three

months then—he sent me to England with my mother. My cousin Carlotta, who was a year older than I, was in Paris, where her mother was living. Her father was already dead. He was my father's younger brother, and he was a colonel in the Republican army. He was killed in the first year of the war. Then, about five months after we reached England, my father was murdered. We never discovered who the murderer was, but my mother never doubted that the Falange had a hand in it. After that, we were urged by Franco to return. He pledged our safety and promised to install me as prince and appoint a regent to govern our little domain—"

"How old were you then?" Shirley interrupted.

"About a year, I suppose."

"That's younger than Kennedy," Shirley said. "Were they serious? Did they think so highly of youth?"

"In a way. I would have stayed in my pram, and the regent would have done what governing there was to do, at least until I came of age. But my mother believed that they wanted us back there only to be rid of us, as they got rid of my father, and she refused to return. Then things happened. They blocked whatever money we had in Spain. They cooked up a damage suit by a British tourist, who claimed that he was injured in Montort through the negligence of the principality—only he was not a tourist at all—and there was a tremendous judgment out of that lawsuit. We had money in Switzerland. They bribed people, forged papers and cleaned out our account there. So we became quite poor. Somehow, we managed in a kind of shabby gentility. When I was fourteen, my mother died of pneumonia. She was rather frail, and the English climate

had never agreed with her. I was at Eton then, a British private school, which we call a public school—”

“I’ve heard about Eton,” Shirley nodded. “It may surprise you—but I have.”

“My mother left a tiny trust fund that saw me through Eton and saw me out of the place with about twenty pounds in my pocket—a bit more than I ever had in my pockets since then.”

“But you came from a royal family,” Shirley pointed out. “Do you mean to tell me that the British would just let you starve?”

“They don’t have a fund for indigent ex-nobility, native or otherwise. You see, Britain fairly teems with the species, and there are more ex-princes around, White Russian and otherwise, than you can shake a stick at. Add to that the fact that we are not by any means a royal family—far from it. We have never been connected, either by blood or marriage, with any of the royal lines of Europe, and since my great-grandfather’s time, we have not even married into the dubious nobility of France or Spain. My great-grandfather found his wife in Wichita, Kansas, when he was on a hunting trip to the Great Plains here. He killed seven of your bison, and he was very proud of it, I hear, and he brought home as his wife a women called Saidy-Lou Benson, who provided Paris and Madrid with half a century of gossip, and who was quite beautiful but of doubtful virtue and family. Since then, we have married people instead of titles, and as nobility, we hardly rate at all. So I’m not much of a prince, Shirley.”

“You’re the only prince I ever had,” Shirley shrugged. “I don’t know about London, but the fact of the matter is

that you're the only prince I have ever seen or spoken to. When something's in short supply, you can't be choosy."

She smiled at him. "I don't really mean that. You got to get used to me." His face fell, and she added quickly, "I know—you have an appointment to be killed tomorrow. But if by accident we should both be alive next week, we'll be introduced. I'll introduce you to Cynthia, so she can introduce you to me formally, and then we can get to know each other. I'm joshing," she added, "believe me. Go on. It's all there except one thing. Why are they trying to kill us?"

"You—well, you, Shirley, because you look like Carlotta."

"You said that Carlotta was dead."

"She is—but apparently they're not sure. Carlotta's mother died when she was twelve, and then she came to live with my mother in England. Then she was put into a school in Wales. Eventually, she became involved with a much older man, went off with him and then was abandoned by him. She was often sad and depressed, and when the affair was over, she found herself alone in Paris, friendless and penniless. Well, she killed herself. It was six months before the French police managed to find me, through Scotland Yard. She had no other relatives, and when she died, I had none."

"All right," Shirley agreed. "Carlotta is dead. I feel sorry for her. Why have they decided to kill me instead?"

"Because you look like Carlotta."

"So maybe a thousand people look like Carlotta. All they got to do is go to the French cops and get the proof."

"Yes," the boy agreed. "They can get the proof that someone called Carlotta de Bernard died. But they can't

look at her. Meanwhile, as much as I have been able to find out, a Spanish olive grower came here to look into the question of plastic containers for olive oil. He was being shown through the place where you work, and he saw you. He decided you were Carlotta."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know—any more than I know who *they* are. When I got out of Eton, I found a job with a private family as tutor to two small children—a rather lonely place on the coast. I was walking along the cliffs one day when a car drove up. Two men jumped out, backed me up to the cliff with guns and then knocked me over. I was five months in the hospital after that. Once I had gone over the cliff, they went away and left me for dead."

"Poor kid," Shirley said. "My heart goes out to you."

"The next time," he went on methodically, "was a few months after I left the hospital. A car tried to run me down. I avoided it. A few days later, the same thing happened. I was terribly frightened."

"I should hope so," Shirley said.

"Dreams, nightmares—I couldn't sleep, couldn't walk through the streets without reacting like a frightened animal to every sound and motion. It was pretty awful."

"Did you go to the cops?"

"Yes, I went to Scotland Yard. They had my story about the cliff, and I think they only half believed that. It was much easier for them to accept the fact that I had fallen over. The attempts by the cars they put down to my imagination. Oh, I was treated properly then, I assure you. They were quite polite and decent about the whole thing—because when you have a title, even the shabbiest kind of title—they are going to be pleasant to you. They lis-

tened to everything I had to say, and the more I said, the more I realized that I had absolutely no proof of anything, not even who I was."

"How could you not have proof of who you were?"

He smiled sheepishly and nodded. "There it is," he shrugged. "I neglected to tell you that when I was at the bottom of that cliff and left for dead, my pockets were emptied. The next day, as I learned, the same two men turned up at the house where I was employed, gave them some cock and bull story about my being called away, presented a note in a decent imitation of my handwriting and walked off with everything I had in the world. I told the police about that, and they were very patient and said they would look into the matter and check it out at Eton and some other places I suggested, and that meanwhile I could have a talk with the police psychiatrist, if I wished. Well, I did feel that I was going out of my mind, but I didn't look for any help from a psychiatrist. Anyway, I'm a coward when it comes to facing up to something, and I had no desire for a psychiatrist to probe around in what passed for my mind. So they sent me to the Foreign Office instead, and I spoke to a man there who dealt with matters on the Iberian Peninsula. After I had told my story, he stared at me rather peculiarly for a while, and then, with a good deal of kindness, he informed me that Prince James Charles Alexander had returned to Montfort a year before this—or almost immediately after I was knocked over the cliff. I guess he could have been nasty about it, but he chose to regard me as some sort of poor idiot. He did warn me, however, that I was doing myself no good by going around and spreading wild and improbable stories, and that if I was, as I claimed, a resident alien in Great Brit-

ain, I could do myself a great deal of harm. He took down my address and said they would look into the matter, and that was that."

"And who was this prince who returned to Montort?"

"I have no idea, and it doesn't really matter. Someone they put up to it. There was no difficulty involved for them. They had all my papers, and no one in Montort had ever seen me."

"And who are *they*?"

"I wondered about that. I had a sort of a job then, part-time tutor at a small private school in Kensington. It paid just barely enough to keep body and soul together, but it allowed me to live. Well, I went on teaching there for the next five weeks or so, and during that time, some of the situation was clarified. I came across an article in *The Times* about Montort. It seems that they had uncovered a very large and workable deposit of manganese there. Manganese is a very valuable and fairly rare mineral, and it seems to be essential to the technology of our times. There has always been a good deal of manganese in the Pyrenees, but not in workable quantities. The manganese find in Montort was one of the most important in modern times, and worth heaven knows how many millions. This discovery elevated Montort from the status of an obscure and unimportant principality to a vital bone of contention between Spain and France. Both were claiming the place, and meanwhile the hereditary prince had returned, apparently under the sponsorship of whoever was cleaning up the manganese—"

"But who are they?" Shirley insisted. "You must know something. Who was the olive grower at Bushwick Broth-

ers? Who kept you prisoner? Where did Seppi come from?"

He shook his head. "I just don't know. I know what they can do—they can do almost anything they want to do. They buy men like Seppi, they seem able to buy anything they want to buy."

"How did you get here to America?" Shirley insisted.

"I panicked, I suppose. I couldn't get over that veiled threat from the man in the Foreign Office—to look into my status as a resident alien. I had nightmares then about being deported to Spain—where else could they send me?—and falling into the hands of the Falange. Then I received through the mail an envelope with no return address on it. It contained a forged British passport for one James Charlton, my own picture in it, a one-way plane ticket to New York and a hundred dollars in five-dollar bills. I knew *they* had sent it, but I convinced myself that all they wanted to do was to get me out of England and away from Europe, and that in America they would leave me alone. So I used it. I left the following day. At Idlewild—that was three days ago—the black car you spoke of, with the fat man and the thin man in it, was waiting for me. There was another man with them—they called him Mr. Santela. That's all I know. They took me to a house somewhere in the city—"

"In Manhattan?" Shirley asked.

"Yes, I'm sure. From Idlewild, we went through a tunnel, that would be to Manhattan, wouldn't it? It was a large four- or five-story house of gray granite, as much as I could see by night, a town house like so many in London. They took me up to the third floor there, handcuffed me hand and foot and left me there. Thinking about it,

it's possible that the whole purpose was to let me see you and identify you. At least, Mr. Santela spent over two hours questioning me about my cousin Carlotta. That was when he told me about the olive grower. At that time, I think you were to be brought to the house. Then, for some reason, they changed their plans and brought me here with Seppi. Mr. Santela and another man they call Flint, an American I think, remained outside in the car, while I went inside with Seppi. It's true, I did as Seppi told me. I was terribly afraid of him. But I also wanted to see you, Shirley. I guess I wanted that as much as anything, even if they were going to kill me. Can you understand what it means to be all alone in the world—to have no one, no kith or kin, no one?"

"That's something I can understand," Shirley nodded. "In a moment, I'll be weeping."

"Then you can understand why I had to see you. They had almost convinced me that Carlotta was alive. God, how much I wanted to see her!" He was close to tears now, full of emotion and choking with it.

"Chin up, Prince," Shirley said.

"Carlotta is dead," he said chokingly. "I met you. God, I don't want to die now, Shirley."

5. The Roof

There was a knock on the door, and they both froze. Shirley was standing; James Charles Alexander still sprawled wearily in the chair. They looked at each other, and Shirley saw something in his eyes that had not been there before, real, unsimulated fear.

The knock on the door was repeated, and a voice called, "Miss Campbel? How about it? You're inside, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm here," Shirley replied evenly.

"This is Mr. Foley, the janitor."

"You don't sound like Mr. Foley."

"That's a hell of a thing to say. What do you mean, I don't sound like Mr. Foley?"

"You just don't sound like Mr. Foley."

"I guess I ought to know better than you what I sound like. How about that?"

"Sue me," said Shirley.

"Maybe I will at that. What I want to talk to you about is all that commotion here. I want to know what gives."

"So do I," said Shirley.

"What do you mean, so do I? From what my wife tells me, you were down in the hall fighting with some hoodlums with a knife. Well, whether you know it or not, Miss Campbel, this is a decent, respectable house."

"Then it's up to you to keep the hoodlums with the knives out of here," Shirley said.

"That's a laugh. What do you mean, it's up to me? Suppose you open the door and we have a little talk, Miss Campbel."

"I'm deshabelle."

"You're what?"

"In English used by people who have an IQ over one hundred, it means I'm undressed. So go down and play with your marbles and we'll talk some other time."

"We'll talk now."

"Look," Shirley said coolly, "don't get rough with me, even if you're Mr. Foley or anybody else. It won't pay. There's a cop in the hall downstairs and there's another plain-clothes cop across the street. So go away like a good boy."

"All right. If you want it that way."

"I want it that way," Shirley said.

She heard his steps then, down the hall and down the stairs, but when she glanced at the prince, his fear had not appreciably lessened.

"There's a police officer downstairs?" he whispered.

"There is," Shirley replied, watching him thoughtfully.

The telephone rang. Shirley went into the bedroom, closing the door behind her. Cynthia's voice greeted her, with straightforward gratitude that Shirley was still alive.

"What do you mean—thank God I'm still alive?" Shirley demanded. "That's a fine, friendly thing to say."

"Well, you know what I mean, the way it is with you. Every time I talk to you, I just say, thank God she's alive."

"Furthermore," said Shirley, "I intend to go on staying alive. I intend to absolutely, and I've got news for you.

This whole proposition about killing people is for the birds. It's promoted for people who are ignorant of the whole subject. On my part, I have come to some conclusions. Anybody who goes around killing anybody is no better than an animal. Not a dog, mind you, but an animal."

"I couldn't agree with you more," Cynthia said.

"All right," Shirley nodded fiercely. "Now let's change the subject. I just want to ask you how you would react to somebody who says he's a prince?"

"What do you mean, a prince? You mean old-fashioned Harvard talk for being a gentleman?"

"I mean what I'm saying, a prince. Like the Prince of Wales."

"Oh, that kind of a prince. Well, to begin with, he's lying."

"How can you be so sure?"

"It figures, he's got to be lying. Whatever there is by that name in circulation, it's got to be phony. I dated a guy once with an accent, he tells me he's a Russian prince, but very poor. Always, they're very poor, because when they were kicked out of wherever they were kicked out of, somebody always ties up the cash flow. So this one—his name is Vladimir Stavenetski—he's got two dollars and twenty cents for a date. We should go Dutch. He turns on all the charm, and I say to him, Please, even if I am succumbing, where are we going to go for four forty, to the Colony Restaurant? So—"

Shirley interrupted. "Look, Cynthia, you told me that story before. The point is, we are not talking about Prince Stavenetski but about Prince X."

"Who is Prince X? That's phonier than Stavenetski?"

"I just use the X to indicate a hypothetical prince. So how do you know he's lying?"

"He's poor?" Cynthia asked.

"That's right."

"Got tossed out of his country and can't go back?"

"Right."

"Mother and father dead? No relatives? All alone in the world?"

"Also affirmative," Shirley replied bleakly.

"What kind of an accent has he got?"

"English."

"I suppose he has got to keep his whereabouts secret?"

"Sort of."

"So what are you asking questions, Shirley? He's not even from Macy's. He's like Hearn's on Fourteenth Street."

"You don't even know who I am talking about?"

"Do I have to know, Shirley? You got enough trouble right now without a prince. You know, Mr. Bergan, he says to me that a girl with the face and the figure of Shirley Campbel, she could take her pick. Except that he wants to be picked. So if this was even the Prince of Wales, with a pedigree signed by Queen Elizabeth, I'm telling you, he's lying. You work at Bushwick Brothers, the only place you're going to run into a prince is in the movies. Believe me." There was a long pause after that, Shirley thinking very hard and seriously, until Cynthia said, "Shirley! Are you all right?"

"Cynthia," Shirley said slowly, "you know a lot more about the factory at Bushwick Brothers than I do—I mean about what they make and how they make it than I do. I mean, working for six months in the factory, you're probably an expert—"

"Sure, when I could be an expert on stocks and bonds and on the male sex, I'm an expert on what Bushwick Brothers make."

"Could they make bottles, Cynthia?"

"Not the way they're set up now."

"I mean plastic bottles."

"I know, I know—but that's a different kind of plastic and a different kind of work. We machine plastic, we don't extrude it or mold it. I mean we take hard plastic and cut it into shape with lathes and other machines. We don't have machines for extrusions. When we need that stuff, we order it to specification. But I don't even know if a bottle is an extrusion. I think it's molded, poured or something. That's a whole different line of machinery."

"So why would someone come to Bushwick Brothers to buy bottles?"

"You tell me. Is this prince in the plastics business?"

"No."

"So don't go looking for trouble," Cynthia said. "What is happening otherwise?"

"Nothing. You remember the bullfighter?"

"Mr. Bergan's bullfighter?"

"That's right. Well, he was in the hall at the house here, and he went for me with a knife. Lieutenant Burton shot him."

"You're kidding," Cynthia said.

"No."

"You got to be kidding."

"No," said Shirley.

"So what's all this about the prince?"

"I got him inside," Shirley said.

Shirley took a moment to comb her hair and do her lips. She was not a woman deeply concerned with her mirror. Of late, she had come to accept the fact that a number of people would tell her that she was beautiful, but the moment she looked into a mirror, she would wrinkle her brow, narrow her wide, soft brown eyes and set her mouth in disapproval. The resulting stern and impatient image did not, as she saw it, confirm what others told her. The mirror was a necessity, not a joy, nor was its effect different at this moment. She had to concentrate on relaxing her mouth as she returned to the living room.

James Charles was sitting where she had left him. He looked at her inquiringly.

"That was my friend, Cynthia Kugelman," she informed him. "Cynthia, like Shirley, are names not only indigenous to the West End of London but also the Tremont section of the East Bronx. I like to use words like indigenous. I used to think, as I said before, that they showed I was ignorant. not stupid. But now I got my doubts. If you talked five minutes to Cynthia, you would decide that she's just stupid, but she's got a lot of brains for a stupid girl, believe me."

"I don't understand," he said.

"Of course not," answered Shirley. "Like if I was to say, Take it from the top again, you wouldn't understand either."

"Now I would," he said eagerly. "It's a fascinating expression."

"I never looked at it that way." She walked over and put on the lamp next to the easy chair.

"Why did you do that?"

"To let in light." She stood over him and tilted back

his face. "You were very lucky, the way you fell over that cliff?"

"What do you mean, Shirley?"

She took a few steps away then, and turned to him, hands on her hips. "What did I mean? Just think it over, James Charles. You fall over a cliff hard enough to put you in the hospital for months, but you haven't got a mark on your face. And it would be a shame if you did, being as how it's the kind of a face Mr. Bergan would give five years of his life to have."

"I was very lucky, Shirley. I did have some bad cuts on my face, but they healed perfectly."

"I just bet they did. Look, James Charles, I don't regard you as any shining tower of courage, but you scare at the wrong things. You almost had a heart attack when the janitor knocked at the door."

"Because it wasn't the janitor."

"How did you know?"

"You said so."

"Because it just so happens that Mr. Foley, the janitor, is an old rummy with hands that got no education except in feeling. So the way I feel tonight, I don't choose to Indian wrestle with him."

"Then it really was the janitor?"

"It really was."

"Shirley," he said, "I never pretended to be brave. There's some notion that a prince has to be brave. Well, I'm not that kind of a prince. I never took to being a prince. It brought me and my poor mother nothing but grief and sorrow, and I never pretended to be brave."

"That's a pity," Shirley shrugged. "I seen a lot in my time, and I don't know if anybody's brave. I'm not, but

I pretend. And I know that a lot of other decent people who are not princes by any means also pretend and do a pretty good job of it."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"OK," Shirley nodded. "So you're that kind of a prince. You're not brave and you fall off cliffs and remain pretty. You also buy bottles in a plastics company that doesn't make bottles and couldn't make them, but only machines hard plastic."

"What are you talking about?"

"Bushwick Brothers, where your olive grower came to buy bottles."

"That's what they told me," he insisted.

"Naturally. Just as the British Foreign Office was so stupid they couldn't be bothered to pick up the telephone and call Eton and find out was their roster of princes short one. Oh no. That would have taken a little intelligence. And while we're on the subject, where is Eton College?"

"No—it's a public school, Shirley, not a college."

"That's what comes of sitting back on your laurels as a prince, instead of cracking a book once in a while. I have never traveled farther than the Concord Hotel, where Cynthia and I once spent a weekend that was a disaster, but even with Fallsburg, New York, as my safari limit, I break up the monotony by walking to the public library. It just happens that the correct name for Eton is Eton College. It was very generous of you to tell me that in England a private school is called a public school, but that's not enough homework for a graduate. And incidentally, where is Eton?"

"I thought everyone knew that. The town of Eton, up the Thames from London."

"But where? Like saying that New Orleans is down the Mississippi from St. Louis. I want to know where?"

"Well, really, Shirley, I don't see what that has to do with anything," he said weakly.

"All right. Don't tell me. So some day I'll marry Mr. Bergan out of sheer default, God help me, and we'll spend the whole honeymoon in England looking for Eton. Because you can't tell me where it is."

"I did tell you," he protested.

"Like hell you did, Buster! Eton's in Buckinghamshire. Anyone who ever read *Tom Brown's School Days* knows that. Not to mention *A Yank at Eton*. Who was in that? It wasn't Mickey Rooney, but I always think of Mickey Rooney. You really told me a story. It would have brought tears from a stone, you poor, unhappy little prince. Only it's so full of holes it belongs in the kitchen. With the sieves and the canned corn. Your poor father, who sheltered all those refugees. Your poor mother, who remained a lady until her poor, delicate lungs gave out. And all those bad men who kept pushing you over cliffs. And the great-grandfather who hunted buffalo out in Dodge City with Matt Dillon—that is really one for the books."

"What are you saying, Shirley?" he whispered.

"I'm saying that you're a liar from the word go. If you're so worried about being killed any moment, why didn't you come down when the hall downstairs was swarming with cops? You're not only a liar, you louse up all your lies—"

"Shirley, I swear I told you the truth. I said you wouldn't believe me—"

"Drop it, Buster, just drop it! You did not tell me the

truth, not by a long shot! And if you think I'm afraid of you or worried about you, you're crazy."

"I didn't say I thought you were afraid of me."

"All right. Now we'll take it from the top. And I want the truth. I'm sick and tired of being everybody's patsy. So start talking. I fed you and listened to you, and now I want to know why you're playing these idiot games."

"I told you the truth," he pleaded.

"If that's the way you want it, OK. I pick up the phone and call a large, overweight cop called Lieutenant Burton. He'd love you. He's the kind of a hooligan who has been waiting for years to get a real prince under the beam light in the hole he calls his office. He's the kind of a cop who gets absolutely neurotic at the thought of people killing other people in his precinct without his permission." She walked over to the bedroom door.

"Shirley?"

"Yes."

"Don't call the cops."

"You'll talk?"

He nodded.

"The truth this time?"

"I said I'll talk." The English accent had disappeared. "But I also have a gun. And I will use it if I have to. So forget about the cops."

"Start with you. Who are you?" Shirley asked.

"An actor."

"And the James Charles Alexander de Montort de Bernard?" Shirley said.

"You've never really felt sorry for anyone, have you, Shirley?" he asked her.

"The only thing I can't afford is the luxury of feeling sorry for myself. What's your real name?"

"Albert Soames."

"OK, Al—that's better. What kind of actor are you?"

"A lousy actor."

"That's something I could have guessed. Now we really will take it from the top. We'll begin by agreeing that there is no Prince James Charles Alexander and no beautiful Carlotta who kills herself. Right?"

"Right," he agreed.

"Then who am I supposed to look like? Who is the girl in the pictures?"

"Her name was Janet Stillman. She's dead."

"Who is she? What is she or was she?" Shirley snapped. "I'm no dentist, and this is like pulling teeth."

"All right. Do you think it's easy to tell you this? How do you think I feel? I may have to kill you. Do you think I want to?"

"You feel like a louse—agreed. So keep on talking. Who was Janet Stillman?"

"She was the only child of Morton Stillman, who owns the Stillman chain of department stores and a few other things too, and what it adds up to is about seventy million dollars—that's all, just seventy million dollars. And he's dying of cancer, with maybe a week or ten weeks to live, but he's dying, and the only heir is Janet Stillman."

"And you said she was dead."

"That's right. Two years ago, she took off with some creep called Charles Alexander, who was a cheap piano player from Charleston, South Carolina. They got married by a justice of the peace in a town called Hammond, Indiana, and then I suppose they headed for the Coast.

Outside of a little town in Arizona, they ran head on into a car going in the opposite direction. I guess they were moving about ninety miles an hour. The car burned, and there was nothing but cinders to identify. So there was no identification, just a can of tooth fillings and bent rings in the jailhouse at Mesquite, this town where it happened. Janet Stillman and Charles Alexander just disappeared. They vanished."

"How do you know all this?"

"You think I'm lying again?"

"I don't think. I got no aptitude for thinking," Shirley sighed. "All I'm asking is how you know all this?"

"I know it because a guy called Joey Santela knows it. Santela has been Stillman's secretary for five years. He knows more about Stillman than Stillman does. He's a genius."

"Sure, he's a genius."

"He is. And he's still working for the old man. It was Stillman's second marriage. There were no kids in the first marriage. Janet was born when Stillman was forty-six years old, the only issue, as they say. The sun rose and set in her, and then she takes off with this piano player louse! Imagine that!"

"How do you know he was such a louse?" Shirley demanded.

"Santela knows. Santela spent over a year tracing her—on his own. He traced her to Hammond and then to Mesquite. He went out there himself with her dental records and checked the evidence. Then he got pictures of this Charles Alexander. That's how I came into this."

Shirley raised her brows and nodded. "I begin to see.

You're the piano player—and I'm Janet Stillman. Is that the pitch?"

"You got it, Shirley—right on the nose."

"All for seventy million dollars."

"That's right."

"And now just tell me this—how did he find me out of a hundred and eighty million people, without prowling back and forth through Bushwick Brothers, looking for plastic olive jars?"

"All right, take it easy—take it easy, Shirley. How do you think he found you? We spent months going through pictures, that is after he found me and I threw in with him. I had to, Shirley. This is the biggest thing that ever came my way—the biggest thing I'll ever see in my lifetime. With me, an absolute likeness wasn't so important. Old Stillman only saw this piano player once. But with Janet, it was something else, and she had to be twenty or twenty-one years old. That had to be an exact likeness, not an approximate likeness. So we got hold of every high-school yearbook, class of 1959 and class of 1960, in the whole Greater New York area—every town, every suburb within fifty miles of the city. It amounted to hundreds of yearbooks, and that was just the beginning. We were prepared to go through every yearbook in the United States. But then, this old bastard louses up all our plans with cancer—and it becomes a matter of days or weeks."

"That was inconsiderate of him," Shirley agreed. "I can appreciate that."

"Maybe you could laugh it off, we couldn't. So we checked out the local books, working night and day, and we came up with almost a hundred girls who were some kind of match for this Janet Stillman—"

"And in the Morris High yearbook, you found one, Shirley Campbel."

"Exactly," he said. "But we ran down every lead, and Joey Santela got a look at every girl. Would you believe it, there was only one of them that gave us any kind of hope?"

"So then?"

"Shirley—for Christ's sake, don't you understand? Our time was running out. This Stillman can die tonight. Maybe he's dead already—"

"It seems to me that your dandy little plan could work, whether he's dead or not."

"Don't you understand—he's got to change his will. He believes she's dead. Don't you think he tried to find her? He would have, too, if Joey hadn't been smart enough to wipe out the trail. Santela's invested his life savings in this project. Sure, the old man has a lousy quarter of a million dollars in a trust fund just in case she should ever turn up alive, but that's peanuts. She's got to return while he's still alive. The jewels alone that he bought her and that she inherited from the old lady—her mother's dead—are worth a couple of million. Another five million in stocks and bonds are in the old man's hands, to be turned over to her when and as he sees fit. Even if the family should fight a changed will and try to expose her, it's good for maybe ten or twelve million. We can't be pigs. But if the old man dies, we're out in the cold. Let him die, and you'll be walking into a lion's den."

"You got me walking in there already," said Shirley.

"You going to say no to a proposition like this?"

"And what about the prince routine? And what about

the two hoodlums and the black car? And what about Seppi? You still got a pretty weak story."

"Look, Shirley—maybe we played our hand too quick. We had to. Santela cooked up that story. He figured that if I could convince you, you'd go for me just out of pity and affection—not to mention a title, which ain't hay in America. Then, if I could make you fall in love with me, the rest would be simple."

"Make me fall in love with you?" Shirley gasped. "You can't be serious, Buster!"

"So it didn't work. But Joey didn't know you. He only saw you on the street a couple of times. He couldn't work out your character. Then time was closing in. This Jack Flint works out the details for Joey, and he sent the two animals to get you. We figured that if you were in the same spot I was, I'd get your sympathy. It just went wrong. We couldn't imagine that those two idiots would wreck the car and kill themselves. They were never supposed to kill you. Neither was Seppi. He was only supposed to frighten you with the knife and let you run upstairs. Instead, he goes crazy, and this cop has to plug him. I wish he got it, the lousy, stupid spick. He deserves it."

"I never met anyone just like you," Shirley said with awe. "You got character, believe me."

"Look. no one's asking you to marry me. All we're asking is for you to put your hot little hands on a million dollars—or five million as your cut. That's rough, isn't it?"

"You're so sure that old Stillman wouldn't take one look at me and call the cops?"

"Joey took more than one look at you, and he says he's ready to swear on a Bible that you're Janet Stillman. Anyway, according to Joey, the old man's so nuts for you and

weeping so many quarts that his daughter ain't by his side to watch him go, that he'd welcome you with open arms even if you were Chinese. So who should say we don't give him a little happiness? Where he's going, he can't take two bits, much less seventy million."

"So you're practically doing him a favor," Shirley nodded. "A little for you, a little for him, and joy on every hand."

"You can be snotty about it—or you can look at it like a sensible person."

"Just one thing, Buster," Shirley said evenly, "and get this through your lovely little blue-eyed head. You ever open your mouth to me and use a word like snotty again, and I will take you apart. In person, I regard you as a punk—a creep and a liar. If I believe what you just told me, it's because I don't think you got enough brains to make up a story like that on short notice, and because I happen to remember reading when Stillman's daughter disappeared. But that doesn't give you rights or liberties. Just remember that. Maybe you can shoot me. But you don't insult me."

"I'm not going to lose my temper over anything," he said stolidly. "This is a business proposition, pure and simple."

"Suppose I say no"

Albert Soames shrugged. "Then Joey goes it alone. He's still with the old man, and Stillman's going to die anyway. We settle for peanuts."

"With me here to blow the whistle on you?"

"You don't blow any whistle, Shirley. I'm here—and Flint's up on the roof. I don't want to kill you—but if I must, I must."

"The cops got Seppi."

"Seppi's a half-witted junkie. He doesn't know what side is up."

Shirley regarded Soames thoughtfully for a long moment. His coat bulged slightly where a tiny gun nestled under his arm.

"Well?" he said.

"Suppose I did throw in with you? How do we get out of here? There's a cop in the hall downstairs and another across the street."

"And Flint's on the roof waiting for us, and the roof was checked out. We got an exit four houses away and a car waiting. The cops are smart. They put two men downstairs and never think about the roof.

"They're dumb," Shirley smiled. "You cookies are smart, aren't you? All right, let's go up to the roof."

Soames stood up and smiled back. He unbuttoned his jacket, and showed Shirley the tiny gun in the holster under his arm. "I'm glad you were smart, Shirley," he said. "Maybe the others don't look exactly like Janet, but a few were pretty good resemblances. I would hate to have had to keep you quiet. It would make me sick, I'm telling you that. I never killed anyone before."

"There's a heart of gold under that rough exterior, isn't there, Buster?" Shirley said.

6. Flint

Flint was a large, square man, built like a pug, with a thin mouth and a flattened nose. Soames told Shirley about him. Flint was an ex-fighter who had once been a chauffeur for Morton Stillman. According to Soames, Santela did the thinking and Flint was in charge of the action. They had gotten together on the basis of taking Stillman, but in his own direct-action method, Flint wanted to move in, clean out the safe and remove the jewels. It might mean killing the old man, and since Santela had certain prejudices about murder and a normal desire to avoid it unless absolutely necessary, he preferred the other method.

"Anyway," Soames explained, "what's in the safe is chickenfeed. It's true that the old man keeps negotiable bonds there, as well as a decent amount of cash—but suppose it adds up to a couple of million with the jewels? What's that against the whole bundle?"

"Sure. What's a couple of million?" Shirley agreed.

"You'll laugh yourself into a box some day."

"How would you get into the safe?" Shirley asked him. "Blow it?" She liked the professional note in the phrase.

"Not that safe. Too big, too strong. But what's to blow—Joey's got the combination. He's had it for years. The old man trusts him. Brains." He tapped the side of his head. "Brains, that's what it comes down to. Joey's got brains, but this Flint is a hoodlum. Nothing but muscle.

So I don't want you to get nervous about what happens now. Whatever happens, I don't want you to get nervous. Let me worry about Flint. I can handle him."

"Who's nervous, James Charles? Nerves, I don't know the meaning of the word. My nerves have atrophied."

"And don't call me James Charles."

"OK, Buster—OK."

They tiptoed down the hall, up the stairs, and on the top floor, Soames climbed the ladder to the roof, shouldering aside the square cover. In the old converted town houses in the Village, there were no flights of stairs to roof level, simply the ladder and the hood over the opening.

In that moment, when Soames was at the top of the ladder, removing the opening to the roof, Shirley was free. She knew that. She knew that if she turned and bolted down the stairs, she had a better than even chance of making it down to the lower hallway and the police officer; and she played with the thought. She wanted desperately to take the chance, but she wanted something else too—and weighing one against the other, she paused a moment too long.

"Come on up," Soames said.

Hooking her purse over her arm, she climbed the ladder, and Soames helped her out onto the roof. As he replaced the cover, Shirley looked around her at the tops of the old brownstones and the circle of towering buildings that surrounded the little enclave of the past. The moon was out, and beyond the glow of the city lights, the sky sparkled faintly with stars. But Flint was nowhere in sight. She and Soames were apparently alone on the rooftop.

"Where's Flint?" she asked him.

"Shut up." He faced her away from the roof's connection with the next building. "Look this way. Keep it cool."

"If you're playing games again, Buster—"

"I said to keep it cool," he whispered. "Shut up. Flint's got a gun. Just do it my way."

A voice behind Shirley said, "Put your hands up and don't turn around."

Soames raised his hands. Shirley, feeling disgusted and weary of practically everything that supposedly grown men did, let her own hands remain by her sides.

"I said get your hands up, lady."

"Why? What are you going to do if I don't put my hands up? Shoot me? Rob me? I got twenty-two dollars and maybe forty cents in my purse. Big haul! Oh, I'm so sick and tired of what passes for brains among the lot of you. Are you Flint?"

"I want the prince there."

"Oh, knock it off," Shirley sighed. "If you're Flint, let's get on with it. The prince has stopped being a prince. He gave up his throne."

The voice said, "What the hell is this, Soames?"

Slowly, his hands still up, Soames turned around. Shirley moved with him. She saw Flint standing there in the moonlight, head hunched in his shoulders, the gun in his hand.

"Put away the gun," Soames said. "It's all right. I had to level with her, because that prince story was as full of holes as Swiss cheese. I told Joey it was."

"You lousy, stupid punk! When Joey says do something one way, that's the way you do it!"

"Sure. Sure. If Joey says jump off the roof, I got to jump off the roof. I'm telling you that she's in with us."

I leveled with her. I gave her the whole layout, and she's in."

"You what?"

"I gave her the whole layout."

"You stupid, cheap punk!" Flint cried, advancing on Soames. "Doublecrossing us with that broad!"

"I didn't doublecross you! Now listen to me, Flint!"

Watching them, Shirley saw that now Soames was not afraid. He was tight, alert, angry, but not afraid. The pink-cheeked, whimpering boy who had sat and cringed in her easy chair was gone entirely. This was someone else, another personality entirely.

"I ought to spread you over this roof like paint!"

"Well, you just try it, Flint," Soames said coolly. "Just try it." Soames raised his voice. "For Christ's sake, put that damn gun away. The house under us is lousy with cops, and they may decide any minute that the building has a roof!"

Shirley held her breath as Flint hesitated. Then he put the gun into a holster under his arm, and she breathed more easily, and Soames grinned and said to Flint:

"It comes to the same thing, doesn't it? The only reason Joey thought up that prince routine was so that we could count her in. Now she's in."

"I don't like it," Flint muttered.

"Why?"

"I don't like it. She don't look to me like that kind of a broad."

"You're a specialist on broads, aren't you, Flint?" Soames smiled thinly and licked his lips. "You can read a broad's mind, can't you? You can take one look at a broad and you know everything there is to know about her."

"Just stop calling me a broad, both of you," Shirley snapped, "or I walk right out of this."

"You shut your yap," Flint growled at Shirley. "You just shut your yap or I'll close it for you. And as for you"—he turned on Soames—"you lousy little punk, I know more about broads than you'd know in five lifetimes. Lousy little faggot, asking me what I know about broads!"

"I told you, Flint!"

"What did you tell me, punk?"

"I told you never to call me that! I told you I'd kill you if you ever called me a faggot again!" The tiny gun was in his hand now. "Don't reach for your gun, Flint! I tell you, don't reach for your gun! Put your hands up!" Soames was taut as a bowstring, trembling with rage, poised on his toes, his lips drawn back. "Up, up!" he cried, his voice breaking with intensity.

Shirley watched Flint raise his hands. He was frightened, she realized, afraid of Soames and of what had happened to Soames, much more afraid than Soames had pretended to be. Flint looked cruel and hard, but it was an accident of the body that nature had enclosed him in. Under the surface toughness, there was no spine, no steel, no resistance. He had been punctured, collapsed like an inflated balloon, and now his soul was crawling with fear and capitulation. With Soames, on the other hand, the skin of a motherless angel enclosed a devil. Shirley knew a lot more about men than Flint had pretended to know about women; she had been dealing with men since she was twelve years old, cozening them, fighting them off, playing the diplomat, the innocent, the bewildered—and she realized now that she had never known a man just like Soames before.

"Flint, you son of a bitch, get down on your knees!" Soames snarled.

"Please—please, Al," he whimpered.

"Down on your knees!"

Now Shirley realized that Soames would kill Flint—that nothing in him or in Flint could halt the progression. She watched Flint fall to his knees.

"Come toward me," Soames said.

On his knees, Flint shuffled toward Soames.

"Kiss my feet, you son of a bitch!"

Shirley walked toward them, slowly but deliberately.

"Stay out of this, Shirley!" Soames cried.

"Now look, Buster," Shirley said, calmly and deliberately. "If you kill him, you're going to have to kill me too. You kill me, and that louses up the whole works. Just think about it. No Morton Stillman, no will changed, no seventy million—maybe even no peanuts to pay expenses. Because if you kill him and me, the cops are going to hear the shots, and this place is going to be eleven times as hot as hell. And if by any chance you should crawl out of it, what do you tell your friend Joey? Do you tell him how you loused everything up?"

Soames was listening to her now. Flint was listening too. Shirley fought to keep her voice level and quiet, sensing that if her voice broke, the spell would break and events would snap back into the inexorable, lunatic progression she had been watching.

"So grow up, both of you," she said. "Right now, Burton could be on his way up here. He's a smart cop. Suppose he goes to my apartment and finds that I'm not there. He's got to come up to the roof. Right?"

Flint and Soames stared at her. Then, slowly, Flint rose to his feet.

"I'm sorry, Soames," Flint said haltingly. "I won't say that again, ever."

"The hell with that! Let's get over to Joey."

"Dear God," Shirley said to herself, "let me just get out of this one with my head on my shoulders, and I'll never put my nose where it doesn't belong. Never. I'll never be a Girl Scout again. I swear I won't."

Flint led them across the roofs. They came to the roof of an old-law tenement, about six feet higher than the roofs of the converted town houses. Flint stood up on the ledge and pulled himself onto the next roof. Then he helped the others up.

They went down through the tenement hallways, and met no one but a middle-aged lady whose arms were filled with packages. In front of the tenement, they were a block away from Shirley's apartment on Minetta Street.

Another block away, the car was parked and waiting, a long, cream-colored Buick sedan. Soames told Shirley to get into the back, but couldn't be bothered to open the door for her. Flint got in behind the wheel, and Soames sat next to him. Flint hadn't spoken a word since his apology on the rooftop.

"Drive through Minetta Street," Soames said.

"What for?" Flint wanted to know.

"Because I say so." Soames underlined the fact of their changed relationship.

"I told you about the cops on Minetta Street," Shirley said.

"Nobody looks inside a car," Soames grinned, twisting around to face her.

They drove through Minetta Street. Shirley noticed the hunched, bulky form of the plain-clothes man who was stationed across the street from her home. He gave them hardly a glance as they slowly drove by.

"See? Cops. Cops are stupid."

"We're smart," Shirley said.

"Sure we're smart. You ride on the money, you're smart."

"You learned a lot since you were an actor, didn't you, Buster?"

"You know what," Soames said, "I don't think I like you calling me Buster. Not one little bit."

"Then what should I call you—James Charles Alexander?"

"Just shut your yap," Flint muttered.

"Drop dead," Shirley told him.

Soames watched her, grinning. "Call me Al," he told her. "You got a lot of guts, Shirley."

"Why?"

"Guts, Shirley. I like that."

"So has an elephant."

"What?"

"So has an elephant got guts. Forget it."

"You know something, Shirley," Soames said, still grinning, "this is Joey's car. His own car. You like it?"

"Why? You going to give it to me?"

"You kill me. You know something—that black car that was smashed up, that wasn't Joey's car. Rented. You know who rented it? Fatso, the one who was driving, and where he is, he's not signing any affidavits. Is he? Well, that's

the way Joey is—clean—always clean. A car's going to be smashed up, it's not Joey's car. He uses his head."

"Good for Joey. He goes to the head of the class."

"Tell that broad to shut up," Flint muttered.

"Why? It's no skin off your back. Let her talk."

"Sure. Let me talk," Shirley said. "I'm entertaining. All the fellows go out with me, they say, that Shirley—she's a creep all right, but she's fun. She's a million laughs. Tell me something, Buster, how old are you?"

"How about that Buster stuff?"

"I forget."

"Why do you want to know how old I am?"

"Maybe I want to be a mother to you."

"I'm too old for that, Shirley. I'm twenty-three years old."

"You learned awful fast. Don't ever tell anyone you're a lousy actor. You're a great actor. You could make a name for yourself on the stage."

"The hell with the stage."

"Absolutely. With seventy million, we can buy a lot of stages. Tell me something, James Charles, was it true about the house? Is that where we're going?"

"We're going to the Hotel Leland on West End Avenue. Joey has a suite there. It's not quite as fancy as the East Side hotels, but it's a pretty sharp place. So just relax, kid."

"Sure. I'm relaxed," Shirley said.

7. Burton

No one simply accepted Shirley. People liked her tremendously or found that they could not tolerate her at all. She evoked numerous and varied responses in people, but not indifference. And in Lieutenant Burton, she produced a diversity of reactions, all of which were disturbing to the lieutenant.

Forty-seven years old, solid, phlegmatic, a career policeman who had not done too poorly with his career, a long-married man with a son in college and a married daughter who would soon present him with his first grandchild, Detective Burton found himself speculating with the notion of what his situation re Shirley would be if he were twenty years younger. Such speculation was uncommon with him. It titillated and depressed him at one and the same time; and when, at dinner that evening, his wife Lucy asked him where and on what cloud he happened to be, he reacted with a meaningless mumble of explanation.

"Well, come back long enough to eat your meat," his wife reminded him. "It's rarely enough that I have you at supper now, without watching my cooking go untasted. I suppose you keep your weight up with beer."

"You know I don't drink beer any more, Lucy."

"I know you don't get fat on my cooking."

"Peanuts," said Detective Burton. "You know something, Lucy, if I was down there in Washington with the

Food and Drug Administration, I'd make peanuts a worse crime than dope. You can't stop. Every time I pass a candy stand, I buy peanuts. Then the boys know about it, and they buy a can of the stuff and put it on my desk. That's death. I can finish a can in one night."

"It shows," his wife nodded. "Is that what you're dreaming about—the Food and Drug Administration?"

"No. No, of course not. I just can't get my mind off this case and this kid."

"Shirley?"

"Well—yes."

"Personally, I don't like the name. I never did. It always seemed to me that Shirleys are one particular type that I don't like."

"It's just a name. Nobody picks their name. But this is quite a kid, tough, hard as nails, and then she looks at you and gives you the impression that she's a thousand years old. Still, I like her. I like her a lot."

"So I've gathered," his wife said.

"Come off it, come off it. I could be her father."

"But you don't want to, do you?" Mrs. Burton said, smiling sweetly.

"Look," Burton said, "in the line of my work, I come into contact with all kinds of people. You know that."

"Of course I do."

"Then why all this fuss?"

"What fuss?"

"You know damn well what I mean!"

"I like a firm man," Mrs. Burton nodded. "Strong man, strong words. Absolutely. And as long as I think of you in that lovely little office of yours—"

"So it's a lousy office."

"—beating up some poor junkie who hasn't enough sense or character to do anything about it, I don't mind. I just say to myself, there's the old lieutenant, doing his job."

"Damn it all, Lucy, I don't beat up anyone in my office, and you know it."

"Then where? Do you take them downstairs? That precinct of yours must have a perfectly fascinating downstairs."

"That's a fine way to talk," Burton said. "That's a real fine way to talk. I bet you believe that I beat up people for kicks."

"Don't you?" she asked sweetly.

"All because I said something about this kid. If I had any sense, I'd come home and keep my mouth shut. Just what do you think I'm doing with her?"

"Not beating her up. I didn't say you beat up women. I'm sure you have women cops for that."

"All right. I give up."

"So do I," Mrs. Burton sighed.

"That's a fine attitude to take," Burton began; and then he was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. Mrs. Burton answered it, listened a moment and then said to her husband:

"Someone called Cynthia Kugelman wants to talk to you."

"Who?"

"Cynthia Kugelman. She says it's about Shirley."

Then the name touched his memory. He picked up the telephone and said, "Hello? This is Burton."

"My name is Cynthia Kugelman, Mr. Burton. I called the precinct, and they gave me this number and told me to call you right away. Otherwise—"

"I understand. What's this about Shirley?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Burton, Shirley Campbel and myself are close friends. In fact we couldn't be closer friends if we were sisters—I mean, we have no secrets from each other, because when you're very close friends with another girl—"

"You're close friends!" Burton barked. "I know. Now what happened?"

"I mean that she told me all about it—"

"What happened?"

"Well, you see, I called her earlier in the evening, because I was worried, which is only natural. Shirley and me—we're both orphans, and that makes us very close and we worry about each other. So I called her earlier—"

"Yes, get to the point!"

"I don't think you should be angry," Cynthia said patiently. "I'm worried enough as it is. I called her earlier and talked to her. Then I decided to call her again, about fifteen minutes ago, and there was no answer—"

"Are you sure? Did you let the phone ring?"

"Fifteen times."

"When you called before," Burton demanded, "how was she?"

"Strange."

"What do you mean, strange?"

"She kept asking questions about phony princes—"

"Phony what?" Burton shouted.

"Princes. You know, like the Prince of Wales or Prince Mike Romanoff—"

"What kind of questions?"

"You know, how do you tell the real thing from the three-seventy-five copy, and I told her that the real thing

just doesn't exist. Then she tells me that she's got one of them, the phony kind, in the next room."

"One of what?"

"A phony prince."

"With her? In her apartment?"

"I think that's what she said, Mr. Burton. It is not always the easiest thing to tell with someone like Shirley, because she has a sense of humor—"

"I know she has a sense of humor," Burton interrupted grimly. "I want your telephone number and your address, Miss Kugelman, and then I want you to remain at home where I can reach you for the rest of the evening. Do you understand?"

"Affirmative, Lieutenant," Cynthia replied. "And please try to help her. She's a very good kid, only stupid in some ways."

"You're leaving practically your whole supper," Mrs. Burton reminded him as he struggled into his jacket. "Can't this wait a few minutes?" He shook his head grimly, and then the phone rang again. Mrs. Burton answered it, and told him, "Larry Cohen, from the D.A.'s office."

"I can't talk to him now. Tell him I want him to meet me in ten minutes on Minetta Street."

"He says he's having dinner."

"Tell him I'm having dinner too. Tell him I want him on Minetta Street in ten minutes." And with that, Burton dashed out, leaving his wife to persuade the assistant district attorney that a dinner half-eaten was a necessary sacrifice to the public weal.

As for Burton, driving downtown he occupied his mind with what he would say to the plain-clothes officer he had

left in the hallway of the house on Minetta Street. During his years of service on the police force, Burton had accumulated a rich and almost inexhaustible store of adjectives, calculated to fit every possible occasion, but he had no more than opened his blast on the detective in the hallway, when the man took an oath that he had checked out everyone who had passed, in or out, up or down. Burton held his tongue-lashing in reserve and raced up the stairs to Shirley's apartment, where he rang the bell half a dozen times.

"Get the janitor! With a passkey!" he roared at the detective.

Mr. Foley, the janitor, his breath as thick and ignitable as a blowtorch, appeared and opened the door, and Burton launched himself into the apartment, through the two small rooms and the kitchen, peered into the closet and then swung on the janitor.

"Did you see her?"

"No. I talked to her through the door. She wouldn't let me in."

"That's right," said the officer. "I saw him go up. About three minutes later, he came down."

"You saw him go up!" Burton snapped. "What in hell do you mean—you saw him go up? Why didn't you go up with him?"

"And leave my post uncovered, sir?"

"You had a man across the street? You could have called him over to cover you. But that would have meant thinking, and thinking's hard, isn't it?" He turned to the janitor. "All right—you can go. But stay in the building, understand?"

The janitor left. "And you," Burton said to the officer,

"you go downstairs and wait for Mr. Cohen from the D.A.'s office. Bring him up here when he comes."

The officer started down the stairs and Burton went up, taking the steps two at a time, with an ease and vigor that belied his age. At the top, he climbed the ladder to the opening, saw that the hatch-cover had been unfastened from the inside, removed the hatch-cover and pulled himself out onto the roof. For a moment or so, he stood there, peering around him. Then he went down, replacing the hatch-cover this time and bolting it. He then returned to Shirley's apartment, closed the door behind him, and began a thorough examination, duly noting the unwashed dishes, two dinner plates, two forks, two knives, two coffee cups. One of the coffee cups had a smear of lipstick on it. Hooking his little finger through the handle, he lifted the other, unsmearcd cup out of the sink and wrapped it carefully but loosely in some paper toweling. Then the doorbell rang.

Burton let the assistant district attorney into the apartment. Larry Cohen, presently none too pleased at being dragged away from his dinner and into a tenement house in Greenwich Village, was a good-looking, serious, slightly stooped and balding man in his mid-thirties. He came into the apartment grudgingly, observing that even destiny had been known to wait its time, and emphasizing the fact that he had never liked the Village and could not understand why anyone chose to live there.

"I'll have the mayor send down the bulldozers tomorrow, Larry. Meanwhile, all that can't afford to wait is the life of one person, so what the hell!"

"Don't be so damn cute with me," Cohen said. "Is this where she lived?"

"Lives! She's not dead yet."

"How do you know?" Cohen asked, his voice professional and flat.

"Because I want it that way, God damn it!"

"Oh?" Cohen looked around him. "No sign of a struggle—"

"No. Could be she went out of her own free will. It could also be that someone tapped her over the head and carried her."

"You said you'd have the place covered?"

"I had it covered," Burton said bitterly. "I had a man downstairs and a man across the street. They went out through the roof."

"Oh? That was smart of them—to know the house has a roof."

"Don't give me that, Larry. I may not be bright, but I'm not a half-wit. This is an old, converted town house, the kind that has the iron hatch-covers leading out to the roof. I went up there late this afternoon and checked it. It was bolted from the inside. You would have to blow it open to remove it from the outside, and this one was not blown open."

"Then it was opened from the inside. She could have done that."

"Or whoever was with her."

"And how did he get into the house?"

"God damn it, I don't know. If I had all the answers, I wouldn't be here trying to think—something I am very poorly equipped for."

"Who isn't?" Cohen shrugged. "I tell you, Lieutenant, there is something about this that stinks. This kid Campbell knocks off two men, and you insist that it's not even

manslaughter, that we've got no case at all and that we don't even hold her."

"Because we have no case. Those two apes were trying to kill her."

"Her word."

"Her word that she was in the car," Barton said. "Her word how it happened. There were no witnesses—"

"But you take her word that they were trying to kill her."

"Larry," Burton said softly, "I don't have a brain in my head. They weren't trying to kill her. The little one had a gun with a silencer. Nothing could have been simpler than to kill her right here. They took her because they wanted her and needed her. They wanted her alive."

"And Seppi and the knife?"

"You know, Larry, before I opened the door, I heard her giving it to this Seppi. She called him every name under the sun—and he's a hophead, as stable as nitro. He may have just flipped and decided to go for her."

"You questioned him, didn't you?"

"About who he was working for—and he swears he doesn't know any names. A tall, skinny kid and a guy who looks like an ex-pug. That's all I got out of him. I never asked him if he was supposed to kill her. I just took it for granted."

"What does that add up to?" Cohen asked. "Kidnaping? For what? It's not as if there's any mystery about this Shirley Campbel. We checked her through the plastics place back to Morris High School in the Bronx. Four years there—eight years at two public schools. The mother was an alcoholic who worked intermittently. The father was some miserable bum who took off before the kid was born.

The kid's life adds up to the same dreary history that this city is full of—poverty, the gutter, relief—

“Just don't feel sorry for her.”

“Why not?”

“Because she's nobody to feel sorry for.”

“Lieutenant, what is there about this kid that's gotten under your skin?”

“She's a human being—that's enough, I think. Look, Larry—never mind her. I know her, you don't. I want to ask you something else. Did you ever know a crook or a con man who was really smart?”

Cohen thought about it for a while. “Is there a point to this?” he wanted to know.

“An important point, I think.”

“Then the answer is no. I've met some crafty ones, some shrewd ones—but smart, no. None of them are smart.”

“All right,” Burton nodded. “That's my experience—and I have twenty-five years of it. Your master criminal is a myth. Someone should do a study of the criminal IQ—it would average out like ninety-five or less. When they pull a job and it works, it's luck, pure luck. But when it doesn't work and you take them in and you hear how they planned the job, it's enough to make your hair stand on end. They reason like eight-year-olds. And when they make their plans, such plans are not connected with reality. I am not going to get into the argument about whether your criminal is always or almost always a schizoid paranoiac; you can't accept that in your line of work. But whether he is or he isn't, his approach is schizoid—that is, when he plans a crime and not when he stumbles into one. He plans like an idiot.”

"Lieutenant, did you pull me away from my dinner to lecture me on the criminal mind?"

"I did."

"What in heaven's name does it add up to?"

"Just this, Larry. Now follow me. You've heard of the old identity switch—you know, I'm your long-lost son or daughter. It's a favorite workhorse in television and the films."

"I don't watch television."

"I do, so take my word for it. Well, it's nonsense. It couldn't work. You have a son, a wife, a daughter—you know them. Nobody's going to push a ringer on you and con you. But to the criminal mind, reality is no yardstick. It concocts an idiot plan to replace one person with another. Pictures are gotten of the person to be replaced. Then someone is found who matches the pictures. Then this person has to be brought into the scheme. Do you see?"

"I follow you," Cohen nodded. "But it's pretty far-fetched, isn't it?"

"So is crime, all crime."

"But this is entirely your own conjecture."

"I know that. And if you want to conjecture up another premise that will fit the facts, I'm with you."

"You know, Lieutenant, I had guests in my home. I excused myself to return an urgent phone call from you, and my guests are still in my home, and I'm down here in an apartment on Minetta Street, discussing the schizoid personality of the habitual criminal. It's as illogical as the so-called criminal act."

"Why don't you ask what I was calling you about so urgently?" Burton said.

"All right. What were you calling me about?"

"Just this. When I showed you those pictures, your first reaction was that you knew her."

"That's a normal reaction when you see a picture of a pretty girl."

"Come off it, Larry," Burton said tiredly. "I left my dinner too. You must have meant something when you said that."

Cohen shrugged and nodded. "If you say so. Got the pictures with you?"

Burton took the pictures out of his pocket and handed them to Cohen, who stared at them thoughtfully.

"Well?"

"You know something," Cohen said, "I can understand why I thought that I knew her. It rings a bell somewhere, but what bell I don't know, and it rang a long, long time ago. It suggests a kid, not a woman."

"How old a kid?"

"Oh—maybe eight, maybe nine."

"Fourteen, fifteen years ago. Where were you then?"

"Still in college. I took time out for the war."

"But you came home, vacations, summers. You saw family and friends of the family. You come from a pretty rich family, don't you, Larry?"

"Well—not really rich."

"Rich enough to know the rich?"

"Possibly. My father was a successful lawyer. He knew a lot of people."

"Is he alive?"

Cohen shook his head. "But my mother is."

"All right, mother. How about your wife—is she from New York?"

Cohen nodded.

"Aunts? Uncles? Partners in your father's firm?"

"There were seven partners in the firm. Four are still alive. But you can't be serious, can you?"

"I'm serious. We'll make up a list of everyone you can think of who might conceivably have been connected with you fifteen years ago, and who therefore might know that girl in the picture. And then we're going to see them, one by one, and jog their memories into activity."

"Lieutenant, this is sheer fantasy. It's like buying a ticket in a lottery. It's grasping at straws."

"That's a part of my work," Burton agreed. "Grasping at straws."

"Aren't there regular methods? Why don't we print the picture in the papers?"

"I don't think they'd like that. They might decide that the only thing to do is to kill Shirley. And I don't want her killed. I'm a fat, middle-aged cop, Larry, and I'm past sentiment, but I never met a girl just like that before, and I don't want her killed, not if I can help it."

8. Santela

The Leland was a shabby, once genteel hotel on West End Avenue in the nineties. Unlike those midtown hotels that had descended to something only a little better than flea traps and catered to anonymous transients for two or three dollars a night, the Leland managed to maintain a certain dignity out of its impressive size. Built twenty-five stories high in the last flush days of the nineteen-twenties, it managed, like a very tall man gone to seed, to present an outer appearance of character that was lacking within. Its population consisted of a number of very old ladies who were easing their long, changeless days with the conveniences of hotel living; a number of middle-aged single men who maintained a dubious existence on the fringes of business, the smaller rackets, the race tracks and Broadway, and who challenged the world and polluted the atmosphere daily with cheap cigars; and an assortment of transients ranging from legitimate tourists pushed uptown by a shortage of rooms downtown, small businessmen who maintained offices there, chiropractors, masseurs, etc., to people like Joey Santela, who wanted a quiet place where no questions would be asked.

As with a human being, a hotel reaches a turning point in its existence when it stops asking questions and in a spirit of resignation accepts whatever may come; and this resignation was something that Shirley recognized as she

entered the Leland with Flint and Soames. Shirley's experience was narrow, limited and youthful, but like so many who cut their teeth on the hard bones of New York, she had a sense of things in her bloodstream that a hundred years of normal adult experience might not equal. She was not sophisticated, but enormously knowing.

Her sense of shock, horror and repugnance had been driven down to the lowest possible median by the time she was twelve, and her innocence was not based on isolation or ignorance, but on an unwillingness, born out of long observation, to sit in judgment. Her sense of taste was uncritical but unerring, and amid the endless laminations of New York City life, she had her own compass and her own dictionary and guidebook. She rated the Hotel Leland much as it should have been rated, and before she ever saw Joey Santela, she knew a good deal about him.

He answered the door of the suite himself. He was a vaguely handsome, dark man in his forties. His thinning hair was jet black, maintained that way by steady application of coloring, and there was the carefully applied shadow of darkening on the scalp beneath, the most pathetic vanity of the balding man. He was dressed with care and precision in a dark suit, white shirt and silk tie with maroon stripes, and he wore glasses with heavy black frames. Imitating various styles with various success, all that emerged was vanity, and this was something that Shirley recognized immediately. He was a vain man to the point of illness.

He smiled with pleasure when he saw Shirley. Soames had called from the lobby below, and Santela was prepared to welcome a volunteer rather than a conscript.

"Come in, come in, my dear," he said to her, and then

after she had entered, Soames and Flint behind her, he walked around her with slow, mincing steps, studying her with the greatest of interest.

"Amazing," he said softly. He had an inclination to lisp. "Amathing," it came out. "It's an astonishing resemblance—absolutely astonishing. Twin sisters—that's what one would think, twin sisters, even to the way you comb your hair."

Shirley watched him thoughtfully. "He's a nut," she said to herself. "Just remember that, Shirley. You are stupid, or you wouldn't be here. Just being here is the stupidest thing you ever did, and you've done some stupid ones. But don't ever be stupid enough to forget that he's a nut."

"Walk across the room, my dear," Santela said.

Shirley obediently walked across the room. Flint and Soames dropped down onto the couch.

"Marvelous! Marvelous walk! Absolutely marvelous!" And then he spun on Flint and demanded, "Where did you leave the car?"

"In front, boss."

"In front! In front! What do you think I got there—last year's compact? You think I won it in a lottery? You know that Buick cost more than a Cadillac?"

"I know, boss."

"Then put it in the garage! Now!"

Flint nodded and left. Soames sprawled on the couch, a thin smile on his pink cherub face.

"Stupid people," Santela said. "Sit down, Miss Campbell. We are cursed with stupid people. Are you hungry—thirsty? A drink, perhaps? Scotch, rye, bourbon, you take your choice, please."

"No, thank you," Shirley said.

"Ah—the voice! The voice! I was waiting for the voice!"

"It's the first time anyone ever did," Shirley said.

Santela cocked his head forward, an attitude of listening intently, his lips pursed, his horn-rimmed glasses in his hand. "Go ahead, go ahead," he urged Shirley. "Don't stop speaking, Shirley—please." He was on a first-name basis with her immediately.

"That's a novelty, coming from a man," Shirley said. "Do you want me to recite? A peach in the garden grew, blessed by the sun and washed by the dew, and it grew and it grew and it grew and it grew and it grew."

"Well—"

Soames applauded. Santela turned to him and said, "I don't like that, Al. What's serious is serious."

"I'm sorry, Joey."

"Suppose you get into the habit of calling me Mr. Santela. You're supposed to be an actor. If you want to do something properly, then make it a habit."

"I said I was sorry, Joey."

"Mr. Santela." He walked over to Soames, and stood there, staring down at him. "Well?"

"Whatever you want, Mr. Santela."

"OK. Now I want to be left alone with her. Take a walk. Buy yourself an ice-cream soda."

"I don't drink ice-cream sodas," Soames said angrily.

"Then buy a drink. Go shoot some pool. Go to the movies. Do whatever you want to do."

"What about tonight?"

"I want you back here by midnight. I want you to get some sleep. We're going in there tomorrow?"

"What?"

"You heard me. We're going to pull this off tomorrow—"

and then we're going to move. I already have the reservations set, three tickets to Brazil on Pan American's midnight flight. I spoke to the old man about it today."

"You spoke to the old man about it?" Soames was bewildered, petulant, distressed. Shirley watched him with interest. She had the sensation of being in the middle of a poorly structured drama, in which none of the characters knew exactly what role they were to play. Soames, she had decided, was totally unstable—wild temper and petulance, and adoration of wealth, and a nervous greed that ate at his very vitals. Santela was obtuse, insensitive. She had known all too many men like him, an inward concern, a self-absorption that created a separate world as he conceived it and required it.

"You spoke to the old man about it," Soames repeated. "What in hell do you mean, you spoke to the old man about it?"

"A little faith, Al," Santela grinned. "A little faith and a little trust."

"The hell with faith and trust! I put everything I got into this!"

"Just what did you put into it, Albert? You were living in a cheap, lousy little furnished room when I picked you up. You hadn't worked in six months—and you were in the claws of—"

"Just don't go into that!" Soames cried shrilly.

"But you trusted me, and I gave you the best," Santela continued mildly. "I brought you here. You have been living like a king, a two-bedroom suite in a fine hotel, new clothes, fine food—not to mention the companionship—the friendship of someone like myself. Is that something to brush aside lightly? And all because you trusted me?"

"Oh my God," Shirley thought. "When I become a girl ranger and pick them, I pick them right."

"You did trust me," Santela persisted softly.

"So I trusted you."

Santela reached into his breast pocket. "Here are the tickets to Brazil. Look at them."

"I don't have to see the tickets. I take your word about the tickets. But if we take off tomorrow night, what about the will—what about the seventy million?"

"Albert, Albert, you're so like a child in so many ways." Soames stiffened with anger, and Santela continued quickly, "No, no—I mean that in the best way. The innocence of a child, the sweetness of a child—"

"I'm not here and I don't believe it," Shirley told herself, and for the moment, it appeared that they had forgotten her presence entirely.

"—the trust of a child. Oh, I had some hopes of the big bundle, the biggest bundle of all. Everyone dreams of that great big bundle, and you were quite right to go along with me. You trusted me, I think, because I deserved your trust, and I deserved your trust because I proved to you that I was a mover. You know how often we discussed the fact that the world is divided into those who are moved and the movers. I proved I was a mover, didn't I, Albert?"

"Go on. I'm listening," Soames said.

"But you are innocent of many things in the world, Albert—your youth and your ingenuousness accounts for that. The litigation of the will of a man like Morton Stillman is a tremendously complex and time-consuming thing. Yes, I think we might have pulled it off if everything had gone smoothly, if he had been persuaded to accept Shirley here in full faith, if she had in the course of time won his

confidence completely. But that stupid swine, Flint, spoiled that. Two of his hired thugs are dead, and that junkie Seppi is in the hands of the police. And something much more important is in the hands of the police—the two pictures of Stillman's daughter. How long before they are recognized by someone? How long before they appear in the newspapers? And once that happens, all bets are off, and we'll be lucky to end up outside of jail. As the saying goes, Albert, half a pie is better than none."

"I don't see half a pie," Soames muttered. "I don't see a quarter of a pie."

"But you will. You will, Albert. I had a long talk with Mr. Stillman today. He still gets about, still lives at home, but he is very sick, very sick, poor man, and his time on this earth is short. I told him I had been in touch with his daughter, and it was pathetic, Albert, utterly pathetic to see how desperately he wanted to see her again before he passes away. He's a sentimental man, and it hurt me to tell him that his daughter did not want to see him. Yes, it hurt him too."

"Why did you tell him that?"

"So that he would want to use persuasion, and what better persuasion exists than money? There are no walls that money cannot crumble. I told him that his daughter was hurt—hurt because he had denied her a heritage that was rightfully hers. Of course he was shaken by this, deeply shaken. He pleaded with me to bring his daughter to him. He said to me, 'Joseph, if anyone can persuade her to come to me, I know that you can persuade her. I am not asking too much, Joseph. I am not asking for the sky. I am not even asking for her to return and live here. I am only asking to see her for a few hours, to talk to her

and to look at her. I am a dying man, Joseph. Is that too much for a dying man to ask? You may believe me, Albert, it was very touching. Don't you find it touching, Shirley?" addressing this last to her.

Shirley stared at them. She knew precisely what she planned to do; she knew how foolish it was; and she also knew that having placed herself in this position, there was no turning back. But she was also herself, a condition she could not alter upon a moment's notice, and she found herself saying:

"I've turned up rocks and found better than you under them."

"Just what does that mean?"

"Guess!"

Santela moved toward her, his face hard and cruel now, his eyes blinking rapidly. Shirley did not give an inch, but said to him quite flatly and unemotionally, "Don't try anything like that, Joey. I am all you got. I am your whole deck of cards. So don't rub me the wrong way."

Suddenly he swung on Soames and demanded shrilly, "What kind of a bitch is this, Albert? Suppose you explain yourself! Suppose you tell me just what kind of a bitch you have here. Whose side is she on?"

"She's on our side," Soames replied.

"You're sure? You're sure?" Santela cried. "Stupid punk—"

Soames' face reddened. His throat swelled as he said to Santela, "I take a lot from you, Joey, but don't start talking like that, because if you do—"

Smiling, Santela went over to Soames and took one of the boy's hands between both of his. "Forgive me, Albert. I lack restraint. Be my restraint for me."

"Crud," Soames muttered. "Sometimes, you make me sick."

"Poor Albert. I press him too hard."

"Oh, Jesus, cut that out," Soames groaned.

"It will be better after you're married to each other," Shirley said.

Santela whirled on her again, but Soames grabbed his arm and said, "What's the use, Joey? What's the use of knocking yourself out? That's the way she is. That's the way this God damn dame was from the moment I laid eyes upon her. She's a snotnose. I think you could kill her, and she'd still be a snotnose. She knows everything. She knows all the answers. So what's the difference? As long as she does the job, what's the difference? Believe me, I'd like to give her something. I'd like to mark her until she's like the twin sister of the tattooed lady. But it's just not in the cards, so the hell with her. As long as she has a sweet tooth for a buck, she's going to play ball with us."

Santela had regained control of himself by now, and he spoke softly as he told Shirley, "Fair's fair, Shirley. I couldn't have been more of a gentleman with you, could I?"

"You're a gentleman," Shirley agreed.

"I'm only asking that you be a lady. Janet Stillman was a lady."

"Oh?"

"For twenty-four hours."

"All right, Buster, for twenty-four hours."

"And don't call me Buster."

"All right," Shirley shrugged.

"That's the way she is," Soames said. "The hell with her! That's the way she is. What did you expect with

something you picked out of the Morris High School yearbook—Princess Margaret? It's a lot more important, it seems to me, to decide what we do."

"I've decided, Albert."

"What? Jesus Christ, what? You give up the seventy million! You blow the whole thing to the old man! So he wants to see his daughter, so what?"

"So he'll pay for it. I promised him that Janet would see him. In fact, I promised him that I would bring Janet and her husband to his house for dinner tomorrow night. But I said only if he was prepared to turn over her trust fund to her—the entire sum in cash, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash."

"And he fell for that?"

"Of course he did. What does money mean to him now—against a chance to see his daughter? He believes me. Have I ever given him reason not to believe me? I'm not asking for money. I'm not pulling wool over his eyes. All I say to him is that I can bring his daughter to his house. Why should he doubt me?"

"And the cash?"

"It's in the safe in his house right now. He telephoned the bank yesterday and had it sent up."

"A lousy two hundred and fifty thousand bucks—"

"Suddenly it's a lousy two hundred and fifty thousand bucks. An unemployed actor who never had three square meals a day, and suddenly it's a lousy two hundred and fifty thousand bucks."

"Lay off that business about three square meals a day!" Soames shouted.

"Just lower your voice."

"I got news for you. I come from a good home. My old

man had money. We lived with some class. Who the hell are you to talk to me like that?"

"Always the temper, Albert," Santela sighed. "If you would think about it a bit, you would realize that two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, tax free, is a lot of money—a God damned lot of money. How much do you think is left of an inheritance when the feds finish taking their bite out of it? Furthermore, the jewels that belonged to Janet and her mother are worth a fortune. If we play our cards right, we can have those jewels—or most of them—and if we sell them carefully, they should bring close to three or four hundred thousand dollars. Do you know what that kind of money means in Brazil?"

"Who the hell wants to live in a lousy hole like Brazil?"

"Ah," Santela smiled. "There talks the voice of inexperience. You have never seen Rio, Albert, or you would not talk like that. And who says that we must live in Brazil permanently? Only for long enough to make sure that we left no loose ends hanging, to make sure that the old man is dead and that we are clear. Then—any place, here, Paris, the Greek islands—the whole world is our oyster."

"Then, if that's the case," Soames said, pointing to Shirley, "what do we need her for?"

"Score one for Charles Alexander," Shirley muttered.

"Oh, use your head, Albert. What we're going to do is not a crime—providing we play it cool. There's no reason why the old men should ever know that she isn't his daughter. He wants so much to believe that she is that he's ready to believe anything. And if he does, we walk out of that house clean, no cops after us, no bells ringing, no feds to make things hot in Brazil—"

"And if he doesn't?"

"Then it's too bad, but he's very sick and he hasn't long to live in any case."

"You're both cute," Shirley said. "It's going to be cozy, just the three of us down there in Brazil. But don't I need a passport or something?"

"I have Janet Stillman's passport. That should do."

"You think of everything, don't you, Joey," Shirley smiled.

"I try. I also thought of the possibility that you're here thinking that you can make patsies out of the whole lot of us. But if I were you, I would give up the thought. You're playing with grownups, and this means a lot to me, Shirley. I spent over a year planning this and working it out."

"I always wanted to know a master criminal," Shirley said sweetly. "Someone who uses brains instead of muscle."

"You don't stop talking like that," Soames began, and Santela interrupted him, "Leave her alone, Albert. She amuses me."

"Sure, she amuses you. Well, just look at the way she's standing there. She's not human, that bitch."

"We all call each other nice names," Shirley nodded. "But just let me tell you this, James Charles—nobody ever called me a bitch without living to regret it."

"She gives me the creeps."

"All right, Albert—she gives you the creeps. Suppose we leave it there. We've got a long night ahead, and I have to convince her that she's Janet Stillman and that she knows what Janet Stillman knows."

"And what about Flint?"

"I'm sick and tired of Flint," Santela said. "What would Flint do in Brazil?"

"He could talk."

"People like Flint don't talk. If he opens his stupid mouth, he puts a rope around his neck."

"You know what I'd do," Soames said, the petulance of the small boy showing through, "I'd—"

"Don't be tiresome, Albert. I know what you'd do. But you can't go around murdering people. I don't like it. I don't want anyone's blood on my conscience. Cheap thugs murder people; men of intelligence use their intelligence."

A few minutes later, Flint returned to report that the car was securely in the garage.

"What now, boss?" he asked Santela.

"Now a pause in our preoccupation," Santela replied, smiling with pleasure at his bon mot. "We want a week or so to teach this young lady how to become Janet Stillman." Santela took a pad of bills out of his pocket and peeled off five twenties. "Here's a hundred dollars, just to tide you over. Find a small, quiet hotel downtown and then call me when you're settled. Take a rest. Play some solitaire. Enjoy yourself. I'll let you know when we're ready to move. You won't mind being rich, will you, Flint?"

"Just don't doublecross me, boss," he said, looking at Soames as he spoke.

"Flint—my dear fellow."

"OK. OK." Then he left.

"Oh, how I hate him," Soames said.

"Hate is profitless, Albert."

"What about the car?"

"Sold. I sold it today, and I leave it at the airport for

the buyer tomorrow night. Now, Albert, Shirley and I have a lot of work to do. How about you going to a movie? Let me suggest a British film—both amusing and calming.”

“I’ll stay, if you don’t mind.”

Santela shrugged. “By all means, stay if you wish. I simply thought it might bore you. But perhaps you could help iron some of the rough edges off her speech.”

“In one night?”

“That’s all we have, Albert.” He turned to Shirley then. “And now, my dear, are you ready for some hard work?”

From the chair she had dropped into, Shirley stared at Santela.

“Anything wrong, my dear?” he asked.

“Wrong? No. Oh, no. How could anything be wrong? I’ll just never tell myself again that I know them all. I don’t. You two—you two are a couple of cards. Yes, sir.”

“And how am I to take that?”

“Easy, Joey. Let’s go to work,” Shirley said briskly.

9. The Ways of a Lady

"No, no, no, no," said Santela. "No. Absolutely no! Never the rising inflection. Never. The rising inflection is the symbol of one long step from Rivington Street."

"I come from the Bronx," Shirley sighed. "I have never been near Rivington Street. Well, I have been near it, but that's only lately."

"I said one long step from Rivington Street. No—rising—inflection!"

"Drop dead," Shirley said.

"It doesn't help us for you to tell me to drop dead," Santela pointed out with extraordinary patience and restraint. "It doesn't help one bit, Shirley. I'm breaking my back to try to give you some preparation for what may well be something of an ordeal tomorrow. The least you can do is to co-operate."

"It won't work."

"I say it will."

"Look, about my mother, may she rest in peace, suppose you found some old bag who was her twin. Do you mean to tell me I wouldn't know she wasn't my mother?"

"If the likeness was good enough."

"You're a nut, Joey."

"I don't intend to be provoked, Shirley, and I don't intend to fall into any more arguments. Now once more. Where are you going? Notice how I drop down on the

word 'going.' Instead of the rising inflection, we reverse it. We have a falling inflection, so as to speak. We throw half of the word away. That's very cultured."

"I am not cultured," Shirley said firmly. "Furthermore, I am exhausted, and the air in here stinks."

"Albert, open a window," he called to Soames.

"Tell him to jump out of it while you're at it," Shirley suggested.

"Go to hell," Soames said, as he went to open the window.

"Sweet boy! Look, Joey," Shirley said. "I want to go outside for a walk. I have been cooped up in this miserable hotel room for five hours now, and I'm ready to choke. Suppose I go out for a little walk."

"Suppose you don't."

"What do you mean, suppose I don't?"

"I mean just what I say. Here you are and here we stay, until we leave here to go to Morton Stillman's house."

"You mean I'm a prisoner here?"

"If you want to put it that way."

"Joey, be reasonable," Shirley wheedled. "I came here of my own free will, didn't I?"

"Shirley, I wasn't born yesterday. You came here because you saw the gun under Albert's arm, and because you're a good enough judge of character to know that he would use it."

"Then what's my game?" Shirley demanded indignantly.

"If you're going through with this, and if you play it dirty anywhere along the line, we're going to kill you."

"Come off it."

"I couldn't be more serious, my dear Shirley."

"Stop playing games. I said I'd go through with it. But you don't go around killing people. You said that yourself."

"Not killing people," Santela smiled. "One. You. What else? You know everything."

"You're sick," Shirley said.

"Just as you wish. I don't know what you're playing for—maybe for time, maybe you're caught, and maybe you like money. That's why I think you'll be sensible, Shirley. There's at least a hundred thousand dollars as your share. You're a strikingly good-looking girl. You could do a lot with money. I say that objectively. It just happens that you don't attract me. Women don't attract me. I don't think I like women very much—any women. So don't imagine that I would be in the least sentimental."

"I know. You're romancing me in reverse, Joey."

"A smart aleck remark doesn't solve anything, Shirley."

"For crying out loud, Joey, you're not going to kill me, and you know it. It would louse up your whole scheme if you did."

"Not entirely. The money is at Stillman's house. I'd have to get it the hard way, but I think Albert and I could without too much trouble."

"What would you do with my body?" Shirley asked desperately.

"That's the least of my problems, my dear. I'd simply put you in a closet and lock it. The rent is paid here for the rest of the month. I'd tell them that I was going off for a while and that no housekeeping is necessary. When they got around to opening the closet door, Albert and I would be old Rio hands and you, my dear, ~~would~~ smell pretty rank."

Shirley shuddered, and Santela nodded appreciatively. "I'm pleased to see that you have some human reactions, Shirley. Now suppose we drop this morbid subject and return to work. Where are you going—without the rising inflection."

"Where are you going?" Shirley repeated, without a rising inflection.

On a bridge table, Soames had set out a sort of improvised dinner service. He sulked over the work. It was half past two o'clock in the morning, and as the night progressed, he became even more irritated and more petulant than he had been earlier. Twice, he had corrected Santela on questions of pronunciation, where Santela was instructing Shirley, and twice Santela had snapped at him that he would do best to mind his own damn business and that two teachers were worse than none.

"Well, you don't say 'charmed,'" Soames said disgustingly. "Even I know that, Joey. For Christ's sake, no one has used 'charmed' that way since World War One."

"You know," Santela snorted.

"Yes, I know. I learned something as an actor. You put her up to these silly things, and she's going to sound like that half-witted dame in the Marx Brothers pictures."

"Suppose you let me decide."

All Shirley pleaded was a desire for sleep. "I can't keep my eyes open," she protested. "I had a long hard day. It's bad enough when you come out of your eight hours at Bushwick Brothers, and then I had that crazy Seppi trying to cut me up and a ballet number on the roof with your two lover boys—"

Santela sent down for coffee, while Soames set the table,

using whatever was available in the small pantry that came with the hotel suite.

"No, no, no!" Santela cried, watching Soames out of the corner of his eye while he had Shirley do an exercise in "The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain."

"I want two forks," Santela said, "and for someone who was brought up in the annex to the Vanderbilt mansion, you might have picked up the knowledge that the forks go on the left, always on the left, the forks on the left, the knife on the right, the spoons with the knife—always, the spoons with the knife. I want two forks, one is the salad fork, one is the meat fork. I want a soup spoon and two small spoons."

"Why don't we all knock it off for the night," Shirley said. "Anyway, I feel like the Prisoner of Zenda. You got me locked up here. I register a dissent and you scrag me and fold me into the closet, so I got to convince this guy that I'm his daughter—but anyway it won't help with the rain in Spain. I can tell you that. I saw *My Fair Lady* twice. That's par for the course with any girl who dates. They want to impress you, so they buy tickets for *My Fair Lady*. But let's face it, Joey. I'm no Covent Garden flower girl. Until I got hooked up with you two birdbrains, I took a bath every night—"

"You see that," Soames cried shrilly. "Birdbrains! That lousy bitch does nothing but stand there and insult us!"

"Drop dead," Shirley said, hanging onto her complex train of thought. "What I mean is that the Bronx is not London. What good does it do for me to wander back and forth telling you that the rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain? It's not even good geography. Whoever this Morton Stillman is, he must have a little bit of common sense

to put together such a bundle like seventy million dollars. Even if he's groggy, he's going to know who his daughter is."

Spreading his arms, Santela said placatingly, "Shirley—Shirley, my dear, I tell you that I, who knew his daughter for three years, would not be able to tell you apart. Of course, he will be troubled and puzzled. We expect that. All we require is that he should be sufficiently confused not to holler copper. And we can do that. Now about the lower lip. Janet had a mannerism, biting her lower lip. Please. Try to make a habit of it."

"Cigarette," Shirley said.

He gave her a cigarette and lit it. "Now the lower lip."

Shirley bit her lower lip.

"Good, good."

"A for the lower lip. Thank God she didn't bite her nails."

"Now roll a strand of hair between your fingers."

"If there is one thing I do not like," Shirley said, "it is the habit some girls have of playing with their hair."

"Do you have to like it? Just do it. The lower lip, and then you roll the hair."

"And then I go to sleep?"

"Do I complain about sleep? Does Albert? Is the stake worth the game or not?"

"I got to wash my stockings and my underwear. You and Albert don't."

"There again," Santela sighed. "I got to wash my stockings. Please, Shirley."

"I told you I'm not from Convent Garden. So I got the habit of clean stockings. Sue me."

"You know damn well what I mean!" Santela shouted.

"Got. You got a prejudice against girls who say, 'I got.' It ain't cultured. I got no culture."

"Lousy bitch!" Soames said, from where he was working on the bridge table.

"Now him," Shirley said, directing a finger at Soames. "He's making a score for himself. Nobody ever called me a bitch before and got away with it, James Charles. Just remember that."

"Albert, shut up!" Santela cried. "Just shut up!"

"OK," Shirley nodded. "I got the message. No 'got' tomorrow. I don't say I got to wash my stockings—I have to wash my stockings, because the damn rain in Spain splattered them with mud from knee to ankle."

Santela walked over and faced her. "You think you're indispensable, don't you?" he whispered, his face hardening, his intense, dark eyes fixed on her.

"Well—almost—maybe."

His arm came up suddenly, and with all his strength, he struck her across the face with his open palm. The blow cracked like a pistol shot, and Shirley staggered back under the impact of it.

"Just a taste," he whispered. "Just a sample. Remember that, bitch. We won't let Albert use that word—I reserve it to myself. Don't think you fool me for a moment. I haven't figured out what your angle is, but I will. I think you underestimate me, Shirley. I think you got a double-cross hidden away somewhere. Well, you know what I got?"

Panting, her face contorted with pain, one hand covering the livid mark Santela's palm had left on her cheek, fighting to control her thoughts, her emotions, her fears,

struggling to keep her voice even and unshaken, Shirley replied, "Being a lady, I won't try to say."

"This is what I got."

"Have," Shirley whispered, almost to herself.

Santela put his hand into his side pocket and brought out a five-inch knife, covered in mother of pearl. He squeezed a button on its side, and a slim blade sprang into view. "Razor-sharp," Santela said. "I don't carry a gun, like Albert here. This is more effective, my dear Shirley—and let me tell you that if you make one step out of line tomorrow, I'm going to cut up that pretty face of yours so that your own mother wouldn't look at it."

"What do you want me to do, break into tears?"

Santela relaxed suddenly. The knife blade clicked back into place, and he returned the knife to his pocket. He smiled.

"Be good, Shirley," he said.

"Now walk from here to the table," Santela said.

Half asleep, her face still smarting from the pain of the blow, Shirley walked across the room toward the bridge table.

"Head up!"

She raised her head.

"No, no—stop! Take it over."

She paused and faced Santela, and their eyes met, and Shirley said to herself, "How much do they need to kill you, Shirley? Not much, I think, so play it very cool. You are stupid, but try to play it cool anyway. So far in this, you have misjudged everyone—Burton, Soames, Santela. You did everything the wrong way, and all it adds up to is being folded into a closet, and all it takes is for that

creep Santela to realize that nobody is going to make Stillman think that he's looking at his daughter. You know that, and even if this Santela is a complete nut, he can come to the same conclusion. So just do what they say. Don't try to think about tomorrow. Just do what they tell you to."

"All right," Shirley shrugged. She walked across the room again.

"Now once more, and this time I want you to sit down at the table."

She walked across the room and pulled the chair away from the table, preparatory to seating herself.

"No, take your hands off the chair! You don't touch the chair."

"So how do I sit down?" Shirley demanded. "Do I crawl under the table and wriggle up into the chair?" And then she bit her lips, and pleaded to herself, "Shut up, shut up, shut up."

"Bite the lip." Santela was pleased. "Always, bite the lip, Shirley. Now go back and do it again. Albert, when she comes to the table, you move around behind her and draw the chair back. You come around in front of the chair, Shirley. Then, as you sit down, Albert will gently slide the chair under you."

"If that's the way you want it," Shirley sighed. She went through the maneuver as directed, and Santela nodded with pleasure. "Once more," he said, and Shirley remarked, "Don't mind me if I faint. Don't even pick me up."

"We get to the eating now. Now let's consider the setting."

"Joey," Shirley said softly, "I will admit that maybe the finer things in life have passed me by. I can count on the

fingers of one hand the number of times I have quaffed champagne, and I have never eaten in Pavillon or the Colony—”

“You don’t eat in a place, you eat at a place.”

“Score one for the Dodgers. All I am trying to get across is that I can eat my dinner without reminding the company of either Sadie Thompson or Damon Runyon. I read books occasionally. I go to the movies. I watch television. I even toured the White House with Jackie Kennedy.”

“I’m sure.”

“So let me go to bed like a nice master criminal. I’m sorry,” she added quickly. “You don’t have to slap me around for that one. It just slipped out. Sue me. I mean—what can I do?”

“You can put your mind to acting like a lady for a few hours.”

“Absolutely. But this Janet Stillman—two years in the company of a character like James Charles Alexander over there, how much of a lady can she be?”

“You don’t learn, do you?” Soames shouted. “God damn lousy mouth of yours, I ought to wash it out with soap!”

Shirley pleaded with herself, “Shut up, shut up—please, please shut up!”

“Can it,” Santela said wearily. “Now let’s get at it, Shirley. Consider that one of the teaspoons is somewhat larger than the other. How do you differentiate between that and the soup spoon?”

“I eat from the outside in. It always works.”

“It does not always work. Can you remember that the soup spoon is likely to be round? The dessert spoon is like a larger teaspoon. Unless a fork should be used for the

dessert. Now I'll give you a menu, and we'll practice with what we have here—"

"Mother's name?" Soames snapped at her.

"Elizabeth."

"Father?"

"Morton." Her head was dropping forward, her eyes painful slits.

"Shirley!"

The eyes closed. Santela slapped her sharply with the back of his hand.

"Sweet boy," Shirley muttered. "I hardly ever wanted to be a man, except that if I was a man for five minutes I'd have a ball with you."

"I don't want any bruises on your face," Santela told her. "Why don't you co-operate?"

"You're so good to me," Shirley sighed.

"You had an uncle you loved very much. What was his name?"

"Albert—just like lover boy over there." She nodded at Soames, who lay on the couch, snoring heavily. "He sounds like a buzz saw. How can I think through that noise? Why don't you wake him up? Why should he sleep anyway?"

"Where did you meet Charles?" Santela asked.

"Charles? Charles who?"

"Him!" Santela cried in anger, pointing to Soames. "Him! What kind of a half-wit are you?"

"All kinds."

"He's your husband, stupid!" Santela shouted, waking Soames. "He's your husband! His name is Charles Alexan-

der! Your father refused you permission to marry him and you ran off with him."

"With my father?" Shirley asked sleepily.

Soames came over, yawning, and said to Santela, "Just let me push her around a little, Joey. I won't make any marks on her. I just want to teach her the time of day. Give me fifteen minutes with her, and you'll see how willing she'll be."

"Don't be a jerk," Santela said. He looked at his watch and observed that it was half-past three in the morning. "We all need sleep. There's a lot to do in the morning."

"What about this clown here?"

"She'll have to do. We play it by ear, and somehow or other she's going to have to do. Shirley!"

"Yes, Master," she muttered.

"You'd clown at your own funeral, wouldn't you? Now listen to me. You play ball with us, we play ball with you. You cross us up, and I swear to God that I'll cut that pretty face of yours into ribbons."

"Sweet boy."

"Just shut up and listen. We'll let you sleep in the morning, so you'll be good and fresh for tomorrow. But don't try anything. Albert and I will take turns watching the door of your room. Tomorrow, we're going to Stillman's for dinner at about six-thirty. I made the date early. I told him that you insisted that no one else should be present, and he trusts me, and he's going to do as I told him to do. Don't worry about it. Don't go too close to him. Hold yourself aloof. Keep your face in the shadow when you can. Keep your mouth shut. The less you say, the better."

Shirley was dozing off again.

"Albert, go into the bedroom and pull out the telephone. It's on a socket."

Alone in the bedroom, Shirley began to undress. She fell asleep. She shook herself awake again, and managed to remove most of her clothes. She didn't remember crawling under the covers, and she was deeply asleep as her head touched the pillow.

10. Mr. Bergan

Once, when Shirley and Cynthia were discussing Mr. Morrow, who was office executive at Bushwick Brothers, Cynthia observed that in her opinion Mr. Morrow was a misogynist—which, as she explained, meant that he hated women.

"I took pains to memorize that word," Cynthia said, "because I find it a ready-made label for a large number of creeps I have been in contact with."

But Shirley felt that Cynthia could not be more wrong. "Absolutely the reverse," Shirley said. "He's a dirty old lecher."

"Him? He never even made a pass—at nobody. Not even at Lucy Koller, who is just dying for anybody to make a pass at her."

"Which proves nothing," Shirley said. "Suppose you had a stomach that stuck out a foot and a half, and five hairs that you combed sidewise over your skull and a complexion the color of chicken soup? That could give you a terrible sense of inferiority, couldn't it?"

Cynthia agreed that it could, and now, the morning after she had her disturbing telephone conversation with Lieutenant Burton, she watched Mr. Morrow prowling angrily between the rows of electric typewriters, computers and billing machines, and recalled what Shirley had said, and tried to convince herself that deep beneath his jaundiced

surface, Mr. Morrow nursed a brooding desire for the fairer sex.

He chose to interrupt her thoughts with a query as to whether dreams were her only obligation for that morning.

"I was thinking," Cynthia explained.

"You are not paid to think, Miss Kugelman. You are paid to operate that machine in front of you, and since it has a full keyboard, clearly marked, it is obviously designed to eliminate all but the most elementary thought processes."

Mr. Morrow was pleased with the way he had phrased that, and since the things Cynthia said about him were said to herself, he did not react to them. Aloud, Cynthia observed that she did not feel very well, and she couldn't help adding that the operation of this particular machine was considered to be particularly difficult.

"We will not argue about the difficulties this computer presents, Miss Kugelman. You are a special friend of Miss Campbel, aren't you?"

"I am," Cynthia replied stiffly.

"And I notice that she is not at her place this morning. Did you share an evening that results in your present state of discomfort?"

"I think that my evenings are my own business, Mr. Morrow," Cynthia said with dignity. "Also, I was not with Miss Campbel last night. Also, I am very worried about Miss Campbel."

"And just what is Miss Campbel up to?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Morrow. It is none of my business what Miss Campbel is up to, and I should think that it is nobody else's business either."

"It is my business to see that this office functions, Miss Kugelman, and I don't enjoy impertinence."

"Well, I don't enjoy being asked to inform on fellow workers," Cynthia said doggedly.

"Inform? Did I ask you to inform?"

"You certainly did," Cynthia answered indignantly, turning to the computer and making it plain that so far as she was concerned, Mr. Morrow was beneath contempt.

To Mr. Bergan, Mr. Morrow spoke more forthrightly and angrily. "What's all this about Miss Campbell?"

"Sir?"

"I said about Miss Campbell, Mr. Bergan."

"She's one of our best workers, Mr. Morrow. I can tell you that."

"She's not here this morning."

"Probably sick," Mr. Bergan said understandingly. "You know about these girls."

"I definitely do not know about these girls, as you so aptly put it, Mr. Bergan. What I do know is that we have gotten communications and inquiries from the police concerning Miss Campbell and her background."

"Yes, sir," Mr. Bergan agreed mollifying. "But the police made it plain that these inquiries in no way reflect upon Miss Campbell's character. They concern something else entirely."

"You know what, Mr. Bergan?"

"No, sir."

"Then I will tell you what. Where there is smoke, there is fire."

"Well, Mr. Morrow, I really don't think that has to be the case in this case."

"Then just what is the case in this case? Would you mind informing me? You seem to be much closer to these young ladies and their problems than a businesslike attitude warrants."

"I just think maybe she's indisposed this morning, Mr. Morrow. That's all."

"And the other matter?"

"I just don't know, sir."

"Can you think of any reason why I should not notify her that perhaps she would do better in another office?"

After sorting out the positives and negatives, Mr. Bergan protested more firmly than he ever had before, in terms of a suggestion from Mr. Morrow. "I just won't stand by and see her fired for a day's absence," Mr. Bergan said.

"You won't stand by?"

"No, sir. I'd have to take this to Mr. Bushwick."

"I think perhaps we'll both take this to Mr. Bushwick," Mr. Morrow answered with dignity and umbrage. "I think you have overstepped yourself, Mr. Bergan."

Partners in anxiety are brought into communion without much difficulty, and when Mr. Bergan suggested to Cynthia that she lunch with him at Kaplan's Delicatessen, she accepted immediately. Over fried salami and eggs, which Mr. Bergan stared at dismally and pecked at with no appetite, he told Cynthia of his encounter with Mr. Morrow.

"My sentiments about Mr. Morrow," Cynthia said, "can be summed up in two simple words—drop dead."

"Which solves nothing. Jobs don't grow on trees, and I don't want Shirley to be fired. Believe it or not, Cynthia, I have very strong feelings toward Shirley. I know that she looks upon me as a wolf, and it's probably some character

defect of my own that has given her that impression. But believe me, I have only the most serious intentions toward her."

"I was always inclined to accept that," Cynthia nodded. "In fact, I told Shirley so."

"Thank you," Mr. Bergan replied gratefully. "That being the case, I think you ought to come clean with me and tell me exactly what kind of trouble Shirley got herself into."

"Who says it's trouble?"

"Am I blind?" Mr. Bergan demanded.

"I can't tell you."

"Why?"

"Because I just happen to be sworn to silence," Cynthia said.

"Of all the damn nonsense! Shirley's in some kind of awful trouble, and you won't let me help her because you're sworn to silence?"

"How do you know you can help her? I don't even know where she is." Cynthia was close to tears at this point. "How would you feel if everyone in New York City was trying to knock you off, Mr. Bergan? That's all I'm asking you."

"What?"

"Exactly, Mr. Bergan."

"Look, please, Cynthia," he said, "don't call me Mr. Bergan when we have a responsibility like this to share."

"I don't even know your first name."

"Michael. Call me Mike. That's what people call me—except at Bushwick Brothers."

"All right, Mr. Bergan. I will be honored to call you Mike."

"Now what's this about everyone in New York trying to kill Shirley?"

"Almost everyone," Cynthia said, and then, because she felt that unless she talked to someone, she would become hysterical, she told Mr. Bergan the entire sequence of events leading up to this morning.

"Poor kid," said Mr. Bergan. "Poor kid."

"Shirley can take care of herself," Cynthia said. "It's just that sometimes you can get into a situation where nobody can take care of himself. Don't you agree?"

"I agree. Absolutely. Did you try calling her again last night?"

"No answer."

"And this morning?"

"I went over there this morning. They got a cop in the hall downstairs, but Shirley hasn't been there all night. And that big flat-footed lug in the hall wouldn't tell me a thing."

"Did you try calling this Lieutenant Burton again?"

"I even did that. So the cop who answers the phone asks me who I am. So I tell him. So he tells me that Burton is busy, and that he has no comment to make."

"Wouldn't you know it," Mr. Bergan commented bitterly. "Wouldn't you know that when you want a cop or need one, you can die screaming in the middle of Fifth Avenue and every cop in New York is at Idlewild waiting for Johnson. But just go through a red light or drop a piece of paper and every cop on the force is swarming all over you."

"I called her apartment again," Cynthia said. "No answer."

"Poor kid."

"And what about that louse, Mr. Morrow?" Cynthia demanded.

"He will not fire Shirley," Mr. Bergan said with determination. "Not unless it's over my dead body."

On his way to Mr. Bushwick's office, where he had been summoned early that afternoon, Mr. Bergan reflected on the basic fallacy of drama, whether on stage, screen or television; namely, that in moments of deep crisis, it always placed the hero in conjunction with the heroine. He did not overestimate his role as a hero, yet he did realize that some such hero-possibility situation was vaguely present in the background, and that at the one moment Shirley might need him desperately, he had not the vaguest notion of where she was. As much as he pictured himself fighting against the most desperate odds for her safety, the plain fact of the matter was that he was here and she was elsewhere. All he could do for Shirley was to stand up against Mr. Morrow, whom she detested—a small and colorless step against the lurid fabric of danger and brutality in which Shirley was enmeshed.

He could be forgiven for saying to himself, "They also serve who stay at home and wait." It was a bleak moment in his existence.

When he reached Mr. Bushwick's office, Mr. Morrow was already there and apparently had stated his case. The Bushwick in question was Gerald Bushwick, one of the three brothers who had, in a process of dizzy growth, become known as the pacemakers of the industry. In the course of his employment at Bushwick Brothers, Mr. Bergan had numerous meetings with Mr. Bushwick, but they had always been conducted with reserve and with an em-

phasis on the hard facts. This was the first time that he, Mr. Bergan, had been placed on the carpet and challenged to prove his position. Mr. Morrow regarded him with the satisfied superiority of rank, and Mr. Gerald Bushwick came directly to the point, demanding to know whether he, Mr. Bergan, knew of any reason why Mr. Morrow should not discharge one Shirley Campbel?

"I don't know of any reason why he should," Mr. Bergan replied stoutly.

From the notes he had made, Mr. Bushwick referred to insubordination, insolence, absenteeism and a generally bad effect on the morale of the office.

"Aside from the fact that Miss Campbel has been away from work today," Mr. Bergan said stolidly, "none of that is true."

"That's a very serious statement, Mr. Bergan, since this information has been supplied by Mr. Morrow."

"However, I am closer to the actual operation of the office than Mr. Morrow," Mr. Bergan said.

Mr. Morrow snorted. "Closer to the empty-headed young ladies who work there!"

At this moment, Mr. Bergan realized that Mr. Morrow had gone a step too far. Even the most cautious and conniving of men will overreach at times. Mr. Bergan remained tactically silent as Mr. Bushwick said coldly:

"Am I to take it, Mr. Morrow, that this is your opinion of employees you have hired to work for Bushwick Brothers—empty-headed? Is this your notion of a trustworthy and efficient employee?"

"It was simply a manner of speaking, Mr. Bushwick."

"That is precisely what I was referring to," Mr. Bushwick

said icily, his heavy cheeks quivering with irritation. "A manner of speaking."

"I did not mean to imply that these employees are either stupid or inefficient. I was referring to their social outlook."

"And precisely what business of yours or mine, Morrow, is their social outlook? Unless these are subversive elements. Are you implying that I have an office full of subversive elements?"

"Absolutely not," Mr. Morrow pleaded.

"Then say what you mean, Morrow. Use language a little more precisely." The moment Mr. Bushwick dropped the "mister" as a title for Mr. Morrow, Mr. Bergan knew the game was his. He was prepared and glowing as Mr. Bushwick turned to him and demanded:

"Does this Miss Campbel get out her quota of work?"

"More than her quota, sir."

"Is she efficient?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Polite? Respectful?"

"To a fault," Mr. Bergan lied, while Mr. Morrow turned purple.

"Has she a record of absenteeism?"

"The first time in months, sir."

"Then what is all this, Morrow? What is it?"

"Why don't you mention the police?" Mr. Morrow cried, playing his trump card.

"Police? What's this about the police, Bergan?"

They were on an equal footing now. Taking a deep breath, Mr. Bergan said, "This poor child, sir, this employee of ours who is scarcely more than an innocent girl was brutally abducted. At this moment, the police of the whole

city are searching for her—if the poor kid is alive—” Mr. Bergan let his voice trail away. Mr. Bushwick fixed a cold, hard eye on Mr. Morrow and said:

“Have you never heard of the word ‘compassion,’ Mr. Morrow? This may be a large business today, but it was once a small business. We have not forgotten the human element. You surprise me and shock me, sir. Indeed you do.”

A step away from a stroke, Mr. Morrow could find neither the voice nor the words to reply.

Passing by Cynthia’s desk, Mr. Bergan whispered to her, “I scuttled the son of a bitch. Don’t you ever worry about Shirley’s job. She’s solid. It’s Morrow who’s on the way out, and if he goes, I give you three guesses who’s in line for his job and twelve thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars a year.”

“I should think you’d be a little more concerned about Shirley than giving the knife to Mr. Morrow,” Cynthia said.

“Both. Both, honey. Look, I’ll wait for you outside at five, and we’ll see what we can do.”

But at five o’clock a Detective Romano was waiting at the street door for them. He intercepted Cynthia first, and then Mr. Bergan.

“You’re Michael Bergan?”

“That’s right.”

“And Cynthia Kugelman. Well, Lieutenant Burton wants to talk to both of you right now.”

“There you are,” said Cynthia. “A whole city of hoodlums trying to kill people, but who does he want to talk to—you and me.”

"We're trying to find your friend, Miss Kugelman," Detective Romano explained. "We're not arresting you. If you don't want to come with me, I can't force you to. But we're counting on the fact that both of you will cooperate with us."

At that moment, in Lieutenant Burton's drab office, Mr. Cohen, the assistant district attorney, was commenting on the fact that of all city employees, only the police lived and operated in a nineteenth-century atmosphere of ancient furniture, cracked walls and typewriters that would do credit to the Smithsonian Institution. The garages of the Fire Department were spotless and shining, the schools decently kept, the offices of the administration frequently luxurious—but the precincts were all of them museums.

"If we charged admission, we might raise our wages," Lieutenant Burton said sourly.

"Modern police methods—"

"The hell with modern police methods," Lieutenant Burton said. "In this city, everything is a needle in a haystack. A cop is not supposed to have any brains but he's supposed to use his brains. That's the crux of it, not whether the walls are painted."

"How do you know that the girl's still in the city?" Cohen demanded.

"I don't know."

"So we spent a day showing her picture to people and we came up with nothing. How about giving the picture to the papers and letting me go home to dinner?"

"All you ever think about is dinner."

"I also think about my work. I did no work today, but I took the taxpayers' money."

"So give it back to them," Burton said disgustedly.

"Will you print the damn picture?"

"I suppose so," Burton sighed.

"Why be so depressed about it? Don't you run into this kind of thing every day?"

"I'm depressed every day," Burton said.

"All right. Now I'll tell you what I think. I think you got a nut on your hands. I don't think this kid was ever in that car that crashed. I think she's got imagination."

"She imagined that creep Seppi?"

"Coincidence."

"Of course. Everything is coincidence after it happens. Is it a coincidence that she disappeared?"

"Then sweat it out of Seppi."

"Look, Larry, when a man is in the hospital with a shattered shoulder blade, you don't sweat him—"

It was then that Detective Romano called up from downstairs and informed Burton that Cynthia Kugelman and Michael Bergan were waiting. Burton told him to bring them up, and a few minutes later, they were both uneasily established on rickety chairs in the lieutenant's office. Burton introduced Cohen to them, and then he explained that they were there because he hadn't talked to them, and that actually all he wanted to do was talk to them and he had no idea at all whether such a conversation would be profitable, but he hoped they would co-operate.

"Where is Shirley?" Cynthia demanded firmly.

"That is what we are trying to find out, Miss Kugelman. We don't know where she is."

"Neither do we."

"We understand that. But the fact remains that you are a very good friend of hers and that Mr. Bergan here

is a co-worker and also concerned with her. You are a good friend of hers?"

"Like brother and sister," Cynthia replied. "I merely mean as an expression, if you know what I mean. I don't want you to get any wrong ideas. Shirley and I are two normal girls in a world where your sex leaves a good deal to be desired, to put it mildly."

Cohen suppressed his smiles and Burton said that he understood. Mr. Bergen observed that he didn't think it was a matter for laughter. She could be dying right at this moment, and they were sitting there. Cynthia regarded Mr. Bergen with new respect, and Cohen apologized and offered them cigarettes.

"I take it that Mr. Bergen here knows all the details," Burton said.

"I saw fit to fill him in," Cynthia nodded. "This is not a burden one desires to carry alone."

"Miss Kugelman," Burton said, "is there anything—anything at all in Miss Campbell's life or past or in anything she ever said to you that might explain why someone might want to kill her?"

"Absolutely not."

"Was she ever mixed up with—well, was she ever running with a bad crowd?"

"That is absolutely insulting."

"We're not trying to be insulting," Cohen said. "We're trying to find some lead or clue or direction that will make sense out of this. That's all we're trying to do."

An hour later, they were still trying and still unsuccessfully. Burton was concentrating on Mr. Bergen now, and

he wanted to know exactly what Mr. Bergan's feelings toward Shirley were.

"I'm in love with her," Mr. Bergan admitted.

"What does that mean?"

"I think some things are personal, even here."

"Nothing is personal here. Were you engaged to her? Was it that close?" Burton had a notion that Shirley could have done better, but he admitted to himself that perhaps he was too emotionally involved to be objective in his judgments.

"No."

"As a matter of fact," Cynthia put in, "it was one of those things."

"What things?"

"Shirley did not reciprocate," Cynthia said firmly.

"It was one-sided," Mr. Bergan agreed. "I might as well admit it."

"You know this is getting us nowhere," Cohen told Burton.

"I don't know one damn thing," Burton said, taking out one of the pictures that the fat man had shown Shirley two nights before. He handed it to Cynthia.

"Is that Shirley?"

"Of course not," Cynthia said.

"What do you mean. of course not? You take one look at it, and you know?"

"Naturally."

"How do you know? It looks like her, doesn't it?"

"Lieutenant," Cynthia said patiently, "when you know a person, your knowledge should be deeper than skin deep, don't you think? There is one thing about Shirley—she has never felt sorry for herself. You know something about

Shirley—she always said that if just once in her life she had allowed herself to feel sorry for herself, she would have gone to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped off. There is absolutely nothing about the adversities of life that you can teach Shirley, because she is a specialist in the field. She has been kicked in the pants since she was a day old, and she made something out of herself, believe me. But that girl in this picture—she is so sorry for herself she can't bear it. Just look at her. She's a regular professional at sadness."

Cynthia put the picture down on Burton's desk, and Mr. Bergan walked over and looked at it.

"May I?" he asked Burton, and Burton said, "Go right ahead. You're a young man in love. Is that Shirley Campbel?"

Mr. Bergan stared at the picture. He didn't just look at it; he stared at it, held, fixed, utterly absorbed.

"Well, what about that picture, Mr. Bergan?" Burton asked him.

"It's not Shirley," Mr. Bergan answered, without glancing up.

"Then just what do you read in it, Mr. Bergan?" And when Mr. Bergan didn't answer, "Do you know her?"

Mr. Bergan looked up now. "What?"

"I said, do you know her?"

"Who?"

"The woman in that picture."

"No," Mr. Bergan said strangely. "No, I don't know her. She looks like Shirley, but it's not Shirley."

"Then why were you looking at it that way?" Burton persisted.

"What way?"

"Look, don't play games with me, boy," Burton said with annoyance. "You didn't just look at that picture. You recognized something. What?"

"I just don't know," Mr. Bergan replied.

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"I don't."

"OK, Bergan—begin to make some sense. Either make some sense or I'll know the reason why."

"It's the expression. Like Cynthia said, it's the saddest face I have ever seen, and I remember that kind of sadness on a girl's face. I mean, it was a face like this, but it was a little girl. It hasn't anything to do with this. It's just that I saw this kid—and then this face in the picture brought me back there."

"What kid? When? Where?"

"It was ten years ago," Mr. Bergan replied hopelessly. "You can't make anything out of it. It was ten years ago, and it had nothing to do with this or with Shirley or with anything."

"Look, Lieutenant," Larry Cohen said, "you're really grasping and you're way out—way out. You've got absolutely nothing here but a crazy coincidence that's empty. So he saw a kid ten years ago! You push it this way and where does it take you?"

"Coincidence!" Burton snapped. "What in hell do you know about coincidence, Larry? Be a cop for twenty years, and then you'll begin to learn what coincidence is. Life is coincidence. The fact that you're here is coincidence. Did you ever think about it? Did you ever hear about infinity? Well, just pick a moment in infinity and go figure the mathematical odds against the four of us being here in the same room at the same time. To you, coincidence

is a problem in statistics; to me, it's my existence. A cop lives on coincidence and he clutches at straws. Last week, one of my men walked into a bar on Greenwich Avenue at the moment it was being held up by two men. He got them and they got him. He's dead because of an impossible coincidence. So don't give me lessons. This Bergan here—"

He broke off to jab a finger into Bergan's chest.

"—this Bergan's got a case on the Campbel kid. Why? She pushes him around. She treats him like dirt. Am I right?" he fairly snarled at Mr. Bergan.

"You're right," he sighed.

"All right. But he needs h.r. She clicks a switch somewhere in his mind. I don't know what it represents and I don't care, but I saw the switch click when he looked at that photo. So we'll get down to it, Bergan. What happened ten years ago?"

"I was a junior in Brooklyn College, and my French marks were high. I was always good in languages. Well, on the bulletin board in the main hall downstairs, they would post part-time job opportunities. I had to hold some kind of a job, and I just lost one. So I saw this notice from the University Exchange for a job for a French tutor."

"What do you mean, University Exchange?" Burton asked.

"I think, as near as I can remember, that it meant the notice was posted in other places, Columbia, NYU—that's why I didn't get the job."

"All right. Go on."

"I mean, this was a classy thing, very posh, and I was not that, not so you could notice. Anyway, a girl got the job. They wanted a girl, and because they didn't have

enough sense to specify, I spent two hours traveling to midtown Manhattan and back. I wasn't even interviewed. Some woman told me the job was filled. But then, I caught a glimpse of this kid—I guess she was maybe twelve years old, maybe eleven, with that terrible sadness on her face. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was like falling head over heels in love at first sight with a little kid whom I saw for two minutes—oh, it doesn't make any sense. I told you that."

"And the photograph could be that kid?" Burton persisted gently.

"I don't know. When I looked at it, it snapped me back—and there I was looking at the poor, sad little kid again. But now, when I think about it—"

"What was the kid's name?"

"I don't know."

"Well, God damn it, you applied for a job! Where did you go? What was the family's name?"

"I don't remember. That was ten years ago. There was no reason for me to remember."

"Where did you go?"

"I don't remember."

"All right, all right," Burton said, spreading his hands. "We're going to take this slowly, and we're not going to get excited. You lived in Brooklyn then?"

"Yes, sir."

"You took the subway into New York?"

Mr. Bergan closed his eyes and wrinkled his brow. After a moment, he nodded. "Yes, sir—I took the subway."

"Which subway?"

Another long pause. Then, "The Lexington Avenue."

"And you got off where?"

"Well, I think there was a school on the corner. Would Hunter College be there?"

"Sixty-eighth Street. Now think—what did you do then?"

"I walked north," Mr. Bergan replied slowly. "Then I turned left—west, you know."

"One block—two blocks?"

"It was Seventieth Street," said Mr. Bergan with growing excitement. "I can swear it was Seventieth Street."

"Seventieth Street then. An apartment house?"

"No. No, I remember that clearly enough, because I had never been inside of that kind of house before. It was one of those city town houses, a private house. You know, white stone front—"

"Good. Now from Lexington to Fifth, we have three blocks—Lexington to Park, Park to Madison, Madison to Fifth. How far did you walk—do you remember?"

"I crossed Park. Yes. I know that. I crossed Park Avenue, because I remember standing on the traffic island. It's funny, the kind of things you remember."

"Did you cross Madison?"

"I don't know."

"Fifth? Were you near Fifth Avenue? Did you see the park? That's the corner with the Frick mansion. You must have been there. You must have seen the collection—sometime?"

Mr. Bergan shook his head sadly. He had never dreamed that this particular hole in his cultural background would affect the life of someone he loved.

"Would you recognize the house now?" Burton insisted.

"I might."

"All right, then, let's go."

"Where?" Cohen demanded.

"Up to Seventieth Street."

"Do you know how many houses like that there are on Seventieth?"

"Not so many. They've been tearing them down like mad, and what's left, we'll have a look at."

"I always figured you for a smart cop," Cohen said, shaking his head.

"Well, that's a mistake. A smart cop wouldn't have any part of a crazy hunch like this. He'd sit here on his fat backside. I'm too nervous for that."

11. Morton Stillman

Santela sent Soames down to the garage for the Buick. "Wipe it off," he said to Soames, and Soames asked him what the hell did he mean, wipe it off?

"It's sold, isn't it?" Soames demanded. "What do I have to do? Be a garage boy for the new owner?"

"We're riding in it tonight. I can't stand a dirty car."

"What am I, some kind of flunky?"

"You know that isn't so, Albert," Santela protested. "You know that I have the greatest regard for you."

"Sure. Al, go down and get some sandwiches! Al, go down and get the newspapers! Al, go wipe the car!"

"You're driving, aren't you, Al? That's a place of trust."

"Go to hell," Soames said, and then he left and went for the car. Santela turned to Shirley and asked her, "How about that? **He's** very sensitive, isn't he?"

"You're both very sensitive," Shirley agreed. "You are absolutely bleeders—both of you."

"What do you mean, bleeders?"

"It's just an expression," Shirley said.

"You know something," Santela said thoughtfully, "you rub me the wrong way. You always rub me the wrong way. Since the first moment I saw you, you began to rub me the wrong way. You're one of these snotty little gutter kids that know all the answers. So let me tell you some-

thing. Tonight, if you cross me up, I'm going to kill you. I want that to be as plain as the nose on my face."

"Why should I cross you up?" Shirley asked him. "Do I look honest or something? Do I look like a Girl Scout? But from all I can gather, you're going into a house with servants and all that kind of jazz. Anything can go wrong. What happens—do I get my throat cut if anything goes wrong?"

"That's just what's wrong with you," Santela said. "The way you talk. You sit there with your God damn teeth in your mouth as if you didn't have a nerve in your body. What are you—a woman or some kind of creep?"

"All I asked was about my throat."

"Nothing will go wrong. Tonight is Thursday, and all the help is off. I was just over to see the old man. There's no one in the house except Stillman and the cook in the kitchen—and she's a fat old bag who sits tight. We have a cold supper, buffet style. You know what that is? The food is out. You go to the buffet and help yourself—why are you looking at me like that?"

"I'm sorry," Shirley said softly. "Tell me what happens if the old man doesn't fall for it."

"That's too bad for the old man, Shirley."

"You're going to kill him?"

"Yes, Shirley."

"Why? Why can't you knock him over the head? Why can't you tie him up?"

"Because he's a witness, Shirley. Is that plain?"

"Plain."

"Good—because I don't want to slap you around any more. I want you to be a nice girl from here on in, Shirley."

"It's too late to slap me around," Shirley said. "The

marks wouldn't go away. After all, what would he think if my face was all blotchy with hand marks? It would make a bad impression."

"You're a card," Santela said.

"Sure. I'm a card. When I walk into a party, everyone says, There's Shirley. A million laughs."

They were in the Buick and heading east when Santela observed that Shirley had been silent for some time, since before leaving the apartment, and since in his opinion she was a loud-mouthed and garrulous bitch, the circumstances caused him a measure of surprise.

"I was just thinking," Shirley said.

"Think out loud," Soames told her. He was in front, driving; Shirley was in the back seat with Santela.

"Let us in on it," Santela agreed. "We get nervous when you're silent."

"It's not important," Shirley said. "I was just thinking about how I was brought up as a kid—"

"In the gutter," Soames said.

"That's right, lover boy—in the gutter. The bottom rung. I knew all kinds of people. Nobody kids me about how nice poverty is. It's not nice, it stinks. But I never knew any killers. I knew cheap hooligans and petty thieves. I knew the kind that would steal you blind. But I never knew anyone who would coldbloodedly kill a dying old man."

"Shut up!" Soames shouted.

"Let her talk," Santela said generously. "It helps me to understand Shirley. That's important. Only, if we kill the old man, Shirley, you're in on it. Right?"

"I'm in on it," Shirley admitted.

"Where does that put you?"

"On your level," Shirley said. "That's a hell of a place to be, isn't it?"

Morton Stillman was a small man. Small-boned, delicate, his hair white, his eyes pale blue sockets of pain, he himself opened the door of the big house in the East Seventies. Santela stood aside, and he was face to face with Shirley in the shadows of the vestibule, and there was a silence as long as forever as he looked at her. Then he held the door aside, and said softly:

"Come in, my dear."

But he made no move to go closer to her, to kiss her or embrace her, only standing aside as she entered, Soames behind her, and Santela behind Soames.

"This is Charles Alexander, your son-in-law, Mr. Stillman," Santela said.

Stillman nodded, without offering his hand. He hardly glanced at Soames, his eyes on Shirley.

"How do you do, sir," said Soames.

"It's been a long time," Santela said.

Stillman's voice was rich and full, more than his size. The very richness of the voice made it hard for Shirley to tell whether he was moved by emotion or not.

"Long," he replied to Santela, as he led them inside, through a richly ornate receiving room, marble-floored and white to its shadowed arches, and then into a reception room.

"No—no, two years is not long, Joseph. Not for me. For me, time is like a film run at crazy speed. The most painful thing about dying, Joseph, is not the awareness of one's fate, but what such awareness does to one's sense of time.

So it is only yesterday that my daughter went away, and today you bring her back. Well! I must be grateful to you."

In Shirley's mind, a sense of pity was stippled all over with alertness, and she was too much aware of her own necessity to weep, even inwardly, for Morton Stillman. Actually, she did not pity Stillman at all. People die. Her own mother had died a long, long time ago, and even before that, her father had abandoned them and come to his own miserable end. It was part of her quality that she could control and stoke the fires of her own anger, and her rage was still less for what they were doing to Stillman than for what these two men, whom she despised more than she feared, had done to her.

She had seen the house from the outside, the ornate reception room, and now the warmth and beauty of this study, four splendid pictures that a lifetime of work at Bushwick Brothers would not even begin to purchase, the beautiful mantel, covering the coals of a wood fire, the leather-bound books in their places, the antique furniture with its glowing patina of age and luxury, the fine rug upon the floor. She could give names to nothing, but she sensed everything, and briefly and futilely, she tried to cope with the problem of one Janet Stillman, whose tragic sadness had driven her away from all this, to die in a senseless auto accident half a continent away.

She wondered how it felt to be rich beyond the ordinary or extraordinary dreams of man, and then to be eaten up with cancer, and sit looking at death and at the same time become the target of two tawdry and pathetic swindlers.

"I doubted you at first, Joseph," Stillman was saying to

Santela, the old man at a bar that was part of the bookshelves, "but I was wrong to doubt you, wasn't I?"

Soames was standing awkwardly in a corner. The room shrank his soul. Riches shrank him, and in the face of riches, he dwindled; as if a fanatically religious man were to come face to face with his god. Stillman had neither words nor attention for him, but he did tell him to sit down, hardly glancing at him when he said it. Soames seated himself in a big leather chair. Shirley remained standing.

"And you, my dear?" Stillman asked. He was pouring drinks now. His hand shook a little, Shirley noticed.

"I think you were wrong to doubt me," Santela said, attempting to keep his voice straightforward and hearty. "I said I would bring your daughter to you, and I did."

Flatly and evenly, Shirley said, "Don't be stupid, Santela. He knows I'm not his daughter. He knew it the moment he saw me."

For a long moment, Santela was speechless. At the bar, Stillman watched with interest, shifting his gaze from Santela to Shirley, but calm and apparently untroubled. Then, Santela spat out "That's the way she is, Mr. Stillman—sick. You know that."

"He knows I'm not his daughter," Shirley repeated.

Soames and Santela stared at Stillman, who smiled slightly and nodded. Shirley thought she had never seen a sadder smile. "Joseph," he said, "people like you, as clever as they may be, know nothing about father and child or mother and child. That isn't a part of your life, God help you. Did you think I wouldn't know my own child?" And then to Shirley, he said, "Who are you, child?"

Santela didn't move. Soames sat in the chair. Out of the

corner of her eye, Shirley saw Soames feeling for his gun under his jacket, but she watched Stillman.

"Nobody," Shirley said bitterly. "I am nobody. I look like your daughter, so these creeps cooked me up as part of their idiot scheme. My name is Shirley Campbel. That's all."

Still, no one moved, and then Stillman asked, very gently, "And are you part of their plan, my dear? You can talk very freely. And without any guilt, because I don't care. I have passed the point of caring about anything in particular. I cared to see my daughter. I loved her very much, poor child, and I beguiled myself into believing that there was some chance that she was still alive. A small chance, but perhaps some chance. Oh, I know Joseph—but still, I beguiled myself. Now I know, and I really care about nothing at all."

"Then why do you care whether I'm a part of their plan or not?" Shirley asked.

"Because you gave me something I treasure," Stillman smiled.

"What?"

"A glimpse of a face that for one fraction of a moment was my daughter's."

"And you're grateful for anything as cruel as that?" Shirley demanded.

"It was not cruel, my dear. For someone like myself, a moment with my best of memories, no matter how small a moment, is not cruel."

"I don't understand that," Shirley said. "But I don't understand you, Mr. Stillman. Maybe if I could give the time to think about it, I would be able to understand about a man as rich as you who lives in a place like this, and a

daughter who can't live here but must run away, and how you let yourself be conned by Joey Santela—"

"All right," Santela interrupted. "Enough!"

Soames was still clutching his gun under his jacket.

"No!" Shirley cried. "Now I have my say, Santela. Then you take over. But now I have my say, and that old man asked me a question, and I'm going to answer it."

Santela started toward Shirley, but Stillman's voice, soft as it was, stopped him: "Let her talk, Joseph. I think you owe me that. If I can be patient, you can." He reached into the back of the bar and took out a thick bundle of bills. "Here is the money you asked for. There is no one in the house but the cook. You have the combination for the safe, and my wife's and my daughter's jewels are there, just as they have always been. So there is time for everything, Joseph, and I want to hear what she says."

Santela stopped. He stood rigid, trembling slightly, but he waited.

"Then you knew all the time," Shirley said.

"I knew and I didn't know. The point is, Miss Campbell, that I didn't care."

"But I care," Shirley said. "I think that's the difference between us, Mr. Stillman. I hate to say anything as nasty as this to you, but even if I was dying, I'd care. I don't have much of anything, but when I was maybe twelve years old, maybe younger, I said to myself, 'Well, Shirley, what is it going to be? Either become proud, or curl up and die. Take your choice.' So I took my choice. I never talked to anyone else about this, and now I got to say it in front of these two stinking creeps. You know why I hate to be pushed around, Mr. Stillman—because all I got is my own self and my own pride, and as soon as I let someone push

me around, then I got nothing. Absolutely nothing. So when that lousy little faggot there in the chair—Soames is his real name, and he hates women so much he'd like to kill every one he sees—once I let him into my place, I was caught. I didn't think I'd stay caught. Up until an hour ago, I thought I'd find a way out. I wanted to live. I still want to live—and that's where you and I are different. But I don't want to live on their terms—not on his terms"—pointing to Santela—"not on his!" Indicating Soames. "But I still think I'll live. They came here to rob you and murder you. But you know what I think? I don't think they have the guts to murder anyone!"

"You're wrong, Shirley," Santela said huskily, and he reached into his pocket, took out the pearl-handled knife, and let the blade click into sight. "You're wrong, Shirley," he said again. "You dirty little bitch, you're wrong! Wrong as hell!"

Shirley glanced at Soames. He hadn't moved. His hand was still under his jacket, but he was forcing himself deeper and deeper into the recesses of the big leather chair.

"Put the knife away, Joey," she said. She was afraid then—in a manner she hadn't been afraid since the whole thing started. She had played her poor, thin hand and it had failed. Santela came toward her, and she backed away.

"Joseph," came Stillman's voice.

Santela continued toward Shirley.

"Joseph!" This time, Stillman's voice had lost its softness. It barked the name as a command, and Santela stopped and flashed a glance at Stillman. The old man had a gun in his hand. He said to Santela, "Drop the knife, now, Joseph."

"Albert!" Santela cried shrilly. "Albert—shoot that bastard! Shoot him! Shoot him!"

Soames cringed into the big leather chair. His hand emerged from under his jacket, but it was empty of the gun.

"Albert, shoot him!" Santela pleaded.

"Drop the knife, Joseph," Stillman said, his voice soft again. "You knew that I keep this gun here, Joseph. How could you forget that? You know that I can use it. I don't want you to hurt that girl. I had no intention of permitting any of this. I don't care about the money—I really don't care about anything very much, not the money, not the jewels. But you couldn't leave it that way, could you, Joseph?"

"Albert," Santela pleaded.

"Albert is through," Shirley said, breathing deeply. "You might as well face that, Joey. Lover boy was never much of a starter to begin with, and now he's through. So why don't you drop that knife? I hate knives. It does something to my stomach."

"She's right. Drop the knife, Joseph. Otherwise, I'll kill you, and don't think I'd stop at it. If I didn't care about the other things, I don't care about this either."

Santela faced Stillman then, and then he dropped the knife. "Lousy little bastard!" he screamed at Soames. "Lousy rotten faggot bastard. I'll kill you! I'll kill you! So help me God, if it takes the rest of my life, I'll get you and kill you!"

"Shirley," Stillman said tiredly. "Pick up the phone, please, and call the police."

She did just that.

12. The Cold Dinner

With Detective Romano driving, Lieutenant Burton sitting beside him, and Assistant District Attorney Larry Cohen sharing the back seat with Assistant Office Manager Michael Bergan, the squad car careened into East Seventieth Street and began the short race between Fifth and Madison Avenues. The siren was open, screaming for traffic to clear the way for a priority mission of the City of New York, and then the whole process flattened because Detective Romano jammed on his brakes and practically stood the car on its head. Swearing over a barked shin, Lieutenant Burton demanded to know what in hell three prowl cars were doing, blocking the street?

"Something's up," Detective Romano observed, climbing out of the car on one side and prompting the lieutenant to remark, as he climbed out of the other side: "You'll get a service stripe for that. You are a hell of a profound detective. Now go and see what is up."

"I can tell you whose house that is," Larry Cohen said to the lieutenant. "That's Morton Stillman's place. It's one of the few museum pieces of its kind left in town, a thirty-five foot whitestone occupied by a single old man. When he goes, it goes."

"It reminds me of the house," Mr. Bergan said.

"What do you mean it reminds you?" Burton growled, rubbing his shin. "I'll see that half-witted Romano back in

uniform, so help me God, I will! Is it the house or isn't it?"

Whatever Mr. Bergan's decision would have been, it was halted and throttled by the emergence from the house of two pairs of uniformed patrolmen, and between each pair, carefully escorted, a dejected man. Burton halted the procession, showed his credentials, introduced Cohen and demanded the details.

"It's a big one, Lieutenant," one of the patrolmen told him. "We got an attempt on assault, murder and grand larceny. Also, something for the bunco boys. Also kidnaping. In fact, it sounds like everything that anyone ever thought about."

"Let's have a look at them," Burton said.

"That's Morton Stillman's house, Lieutenant," the patrolman informed him. "Mr. Stillman is—"

"I know who Mr. Stillman is," Burton snapped. "Who are these two?"

"This one—" One of the officers tilted Santela's head up, so that his face caught the light of the sun that was just beginning to sink behind the trees of Central Park. "This one was Mr. Stillman's private secretary. His name's Joseph Santela. By the way, we can add to it, Sullivan Law. There's almost nothing on the list they didn't make. This one here, the punk, he is not familiar. He was packing a gun in a shoulder holster, just like on TV. The other one had a knife, so they're both on the concealed weapons kick. This one is called Albert Soames."

Soames was weeping quietly.

"What is he crying about?" Burton asked. "Did you push him around?"

"Never laid a hand on either of them, Lieutenant, so

help me. This is a weeper, that's all. He was with the tears when we came in."

"You said kidnaping?"

"That's right, Lieutenant."

"Who? Who did they kidnap?"

"Some kid from downtown. She's a ringer for Mr. Stillman's dead daughter. That's where the bunco comes into it."

"Her name wouldn't be Shirley Campbel?"

The officer consulted his notebook and then said admiringly, "You hit the nail right on the head, Lieutenant."

The officer stationed at the door of the town house was telling people to keep moving. "It's all over, folks," he said. "There's nothing here. So just keep moving and keep the sidewalk clear."

Two of the prowl cars had driven off with Santela and Soames. Detective Romano asked Burton what he should do with the squad car.

"Leave it in the middle of the street," Burton replied sourly. "You don't want the traffic to go by, do you?"

"I know, Lieutenant. I was just asking whether you wanted me to wait."

"Wait."

"OK—OK," nodded Romano, asking himself, "Now what the devil is he all burned up over?"

"I want to see Mr. Stillman," Burton told the officer at the door.

"Sure, Lieutenant. He said that if any of the police wanted to see him, I should take them in. Will you follow me, please?"

The officer went inside. Burton followed him, and Cohen

followed Burton, and Mr. Bergan walked along bleakly, following the assistant district attorney and the lieutenant. No one had asked Mr. Bergan to come, but then neither had anyone instructed him not to come. No one had congratulated him for finding the house where he had been once, ten years ago, but then, no one appeared to remember that he had been looking for the house. For thirty years, his life had been empty of any moment of true glory, of heroism, of that kind of selfless and heroic behavior that allows a man—or so Mr. Bergan thought—to stop doubting himself and to rest content upon the strong pinnacle of his own achievement. Now, finally, when that moment had come, it had even more speedily gone. Mr. Bergan had done nothing, contributed nothing, achieved nothing.

As he walked through the ornate reception room, the past came back to Mr. Bergan, but it came back as history repeating itself. He had failed then as he had failed now. It occurred to him that he might pass by Cohen, overtake the lieutenant, tap him upon the shoulder and remind him that this was the house. He rejected the thought.

"He knows it's the house," Mr. Bergan told himself.

He also realized that Lieutenant Burton was in no mood to be reminded of anything, so he simply followed them through a broad hallway to the back of the house. Here the patrolman opened a pair of double doors, and Mr. Bergan saw a long, splendid dining room, crystal chandeliers overhead, and a table set with glittering service. At one side of the room, there was a broad buffet, crowded with platters of cold food. And at the end of the table, Shirley Campbel was eating her supper in the company of a small, white-haired old man. As they entered, the old man rose and looked at them inquiringly.

Burton explained who he was, and he introduced the others, and when Larry Cohen shook hands with Shirley, he said that he was pleased to discover that she was real.

"So am I," Shirley said. "I am also pleased to know that I am alive. The only thing I don't know is what is Mr. Bergan doing here?" There was a touch of asperity in her voice, and that reassured Mr. Bergan. It convinced him that this was the old Shirley, and that whatever she had been through, it had worked no basic change in her character.

"Well—well, it just worked out that way."

"Mr. Bergan is being modest," said Lieutenant Burton. "He led us here. The fact that we came late doesn't alter the fact that he led us here."

"He did?" Shirley exclaimed.

"Yes, he did."

"But how? I mean, how could he?"

"I'll tell you that later, Shirley," Mr. Bergan mumbled. "I guess now, if you don't need me—"

"Please," Mr. Stillman interrupted, "please, gentlemen, I have forgotten myself, my hospitality and my manners. That's what comes of living alone for too long. Have you eaten dinner—or have I allowed you to stand here hungry?"

There were no disclaimers. Lieutenant Burton could not drag his eyes away from the platters of food, and Larry Cohen had missed his dinner again. Only Mr. Bergan felt sadly without appetite.

"Then please join us in this cold supper. There is food enough and good wine, and it's not so often that I have guests in my house these days. I think you will want to know what happened here tonight, and what better way to

tell you than over a plate of good food. So please be my guests—all of you."

They were already heaping their plates when Stillman said to Cohen, "The more reason for me to welcome you here, Mr. Cohen. Your father and I were good friends. In fact, I think you met my daughter here a year or two before she died."

"You did?" Burton said to Cohen.

The assistant district attorney shook his head helplessly, and Burton said, "You don't need brains to be a cop—not at all. Only for the D.A.'s office."

It was an hour and a half later, and Burton and Cohen had gone their separate ways, and Mr. Stillman was left with Shirley and Mr. Bergan.

Before leaving, Lieutenant Burton had taken Shirley aside and had said to her, "We may have to see you again, Shirley, and eventually you'll have to be a witness in court—but that's not for you to worry about. I don't want you to worry about anything, and this is over."

"I didn't think I'd ever feel good about a cop. I do."

"I'm glad you do," Burton nodded. "You know, when a man has a stomach the size of mine and a daughter your age—which I have got—it gives him a certain freedom. So I can tell you that no other woman ever made me wish devoutly that I was twenty years younger."

Shirley went up on her toes and kissed him.

"I'm a lousy cop," he mumbled. "I should have been here before any of this started."

"You're a wonderful cop," Shirley grinned, and then he left, and after he and Cohen had gone, Stillman begged

the two of them, Shirley and Mr. Bergan, to remain a little longer.

"I'm a lonely man," he said, "and tonight I'm a frightened man. I put up a cool front, but God, I was afraid."

"For yourself?" Shirley asked.

"No," he said. "No, my dear, I was afraid for you. I can't tell you how afraid I was for you. You see, you tell me that my daughter is dead. Well, I have accepted that for a long time now. There was no other explanation why she would not get in touch with me. But when you came through that door—well, I knew you were not Janet. I knew it the moment I saw you, but in another way you were. Every time I look at you now, I see my daughter—not the way she was—but the way she should have been. Yes, Shirley, the way she should have been, and not corroded with sadness and depression." He addressed himself to both of them:

"I loved her so much, and yet if you could have seen her—even when she was a child, that sorrow that pervaded her was a part of her, like a disease. If you had ever seen her, you would have remembered that sorrow. You would never have forgotten it. You would have remembered it."

"I did remember it," Mr. Bergan said.

They both looked at him curiously.

"I remembered it because I was here once, ten years ago, and I never forgot her—and I don't think I will in all my life. I thought it was the most beautiful face I ever saw. I guess it was."

"What on earth are you talking about, Mr. Bergan?" Shirley asked.

Then he told her and Mr. Stillman the story of how he

came to lead Burton and Cohen to the house. Shirley watched him as he told the story, haltingly, awkwardly, and she thought to herself that she had never really looked at Mr. Bergan before, or listened to him, for that matter. He was quite good-looking, and when he forgot about his position as assistant office manager at Bushwick Brothers, he was rather nice.

When finally they rose to leave, Mr. Stillman went to the door with them. He said to Shirley, "My dear, I know how busy a young woman is—especially a young woman who works for a living; but what I ask is a short-term thing. I will even bluntly plead the fact that I have so short a time to live. Will you come to see me sometimes—have dinner with me, spend an hour. It need be no more than that."

"You know something," Shirley said, "I'll do it. Not because I feel sorry for you, but because I like you."

"Thank you, my dear," the old man said. "Thank you for everything."

As Shirley and Mr. Bergan walked along Seventieth Street toward Fifth Avenue, Shirley took a handkerchief out of her purse and dabbed at her eyes.

"You're not crying, Shirley?" Mr. Bergan asked.

"I am not crying, Mr. Bergan," Shirley snapped at him. "Not by a long shot, I am not. In fact, I can inform you that I have not indulged in what is popularly known as feminine tears since I was maybe ten or twelve years old."

"Yes," said Mr. Bergan. Then, after a moment, he added, "My name is Michael. People call me Mike."

Shirley did not reply, and a few moments later, when they reached Fifth Avenue, Mr. Bergan said, "All right. I can face it. I am a loser, Shirley. I always have been."

"That's a stupid thing to say."

"Maybe it is. God, I wanted so much to be a hero tonight. In front of you. I never wanted anything in the world as much as to be a hero."

"Mike," Shirley smiled, "maybe you were."

Mr. Bergan took Shirley home in a cab. She told him that since it was so late, and since she was exhausted enough to sleep standing up, he should keep the cab and go on home himself. But on Minetta Street, as she got out of the cab, she leaned over and kissed him. It was her night for kissing people, she told herself. Mr. Bergan did not react. He just sat there, silent and dumfounded, while the cab drove away.

As Shirley entered her house, Mr. Foley barred her path and demanded to know, once and for all, what was going on there.

"You want to know?" Shirley said incredulously.

"Indeed, I do," the janitor replied.

"Drop dead," Shirley sighed, pushing him away, and said over her shoulder as she went upstairs, "One day, Mr. Foley, believe me, I am going to get angry with you. Just don't ever ask me again what is going on. It is absolutely none of your business what is going on."

She entered her apartment, locked the door behind her and collapsed onto the sofa. She kicked off her shoes, stretched out her legs and took several deep breaths. Then she looked about her living room, making an inventory of its contents, seeing everything newly and with great pleasure and appreciation.

She had been there perhaps five minutes, luxuriating in the simple fact of being at home when the telephone rang.

She went into the bedroom to answer it, and the voice of Cynthia said:

"Are you alive? Just answer me that. Are you alive?"

"Cynthia, you would not believe it. You simply would not."

"Don't I know that? I have been calling you every fifteen minutes for the past four hours."

"I mean it's too much," Shirley said.

"I could write a book myself. Are you hurt? Wounded?"

"Don't be silly."

"I could give you lessons in silliness," said Cynthia. "I never cried so much in my life."

"I am perfectly all right. Exhausted—but otherwise nothing."

"Then start at the beginning. I want every word of it."

Shirley started at the beginning, and an hour later, Cynthia had more or less every word of it up to the moment Shirley had kissed Mr. Bergan.

"Well, you know what I think?" Cynthia said at that point. "I think he deserved it absolutely—but absolutely. Because did you by any chance know that Mr. Morrow was going to fire you?"

"No. The louse! Why?"

"You know, absenteeism, insolence, etcetera, etcetera."

"Well! I can believe anything now."

"You won't believe this," Cynthia said smugly. "Just guess who went into Mr. Gerald Bushwick's office and put up a stand up and fight for you?"

"No?"

"Mr. Michael Bergan. The same."

"Against Morrow?"

"Against that very same louse."

"Oh—Cynthia! And I have been such a rat about him."

"Affirmative."

"I don't know what makes me act like that. He says something nice to me, and what do I say to him?"

"Drop dead."

"Exactly. Why do I do it?"

"I'm no psychiatrist, Shirley, but I think you are being unduly defensive."

"Was he fired, Cynthia?"

"Quite to the contrary. He was not only not fired, but Mr. Bushwick gave specific instruction to Mr. Morrow that you were not to be fired."

"How about that?" Shirley said.

"So I think that right now you need some sleep."

"Right now," Shirley said, "I need a long, hot bath, so that I can wipe off all traces of two creeps called Albert and Joey. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Just don't get in late," said Cynthia. "Just don't give that Morrow a chance for anything."

13. You Only Live Once

But the downfall of Mr. Morrow came quite differently, through an unexpected set of circumstances. Three weeks later, very suddenly, Morton Stillman died. Shirley had seen him four more times before his death, and had become very fond of him. It was a blow to her when he died, and she locked herself up in her apartment and after ten years, she allowed herself to weep. It was like a dam breaking, and it was good for her. She took the day off to go to his funeral, where she sat quietly in a corner, unnoticed by the Stillman family and unrecognized, since she had turned up the collar of her jacket, hidden her face behind a veil and her hair under a hat. She didn't want any ghosts raised and she did not want any scenes over her resemblance to Janet Stillman.

However, Mr. Morrow marked her absence, and sent a memo on the subject to Mr. Bushwick. He was a dogged man, and determined to come to his victory.

Five days after this, Mr. Stillman's will was read, and the following day, the newspapers carried headlines concerning an office employee of Bushwick Brothers on Houston Street, who had just come into a \$250,000.00 trust fund. Shirley's picture appeared alongside of a picture of Janet Stillman, and for the first time, at least a sketchy story of what had happened that night at the Stillman mansion was revealed in print.

For forty-eight hours thereafter, Shirley was an object of concentration for newspaper writers, magazine feature writers and television interviewers; but Cynthia felt that the high spot of the whole business was the interview with Gabe Pressman of the National Broadcasting Company, which was held in Mr. Gerald Bushwick's office.

It was Mr. Bushwick himself who volunteered the use of his office, and he understandably agreed to participate in the interview if it was necessary. Shirley, upset and bewildered by the whole thing, wore her black knit, a very plain dress which, Cynthia held, did something for her figure but nothing in particular for her face and hair.

When all the apparatus for the interview had been set up in Mr. Bushwick's office, which required a good part of the morning, Mr. Bushwick, Mr. Pressman, Shirley and the technicians foregathered there.

"We do this very simply and off the cuff, Shirley," Mr. Pressman said to her. "I will call you Shirley. You will call me Gabe. That's simply a matter of the form we use. Since Mr. Bushwick is a little older than either of us, we'll call him Mr. Bushwick. I ask the questions. You answer them. Don't worry about anything. Are you ready?"

"I guess so," Shirley nodded.

"All right. Now, Shirley, how does it feel to inherit a quarter of a million dollars?"

"I'm still numb," Shirley replied. "The only thing I can really feel is a sense of sorrow about the death of Mr. Stillman. I liked him."

"Did you expect the inheritance, Shirley?"

"No—not at all."

"What are you going to do with the money?"

"I can't do anything about what they call the principal—

I mean the money itself, because that has to be held in trust for the next ten years. But I have an income from it, which is more money than I ever dreamed I would have."

"How does it feel to be the richest employee of Bushwick Brothers, Shirley?"

"I don't know, Gabe. I don't feel anything about it."

"Will you go on working here, Shirley?"

"I hope so, Gabe."

"Why? You're rich enough to stop."

"I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I stopped, Gabe. I always worked."

And turning to Mr. Bushwick, "What about you, Mr. Bushwick? How do you feel about this?"

"I'll tell you, Gabe. We are glad that Shirley came into this money. But we are not impressed by the money. We are impressed by the character of one of our employees—by the courage this girl displayed. That's what impresses us."

Shirley spent that evening at Cynthia's apartment, not only to escape the reporters, but because Cynthia's twenty-one-inch screen was more impressive than Shirley's seventeen-inch screen, and because the image was always clearer at Cynthia's place.

"How about that," Cynthia said when Mr. Bushwick spoke his piece. "You know something I'm almost sorry for Mr. Morrow."

"I was feeling the same thing," Shirley agreed.

"It doesn't even help to say that he brought it on himself."

"It doesn't."

"Well—kee, sirrah, sirrah—"

"What?"

"You know, what will be will be, like the French say."

Mr. Bushwick's thoughts were traveling somewhat in the same channels, as he watched the interview on his twenty-nine-inch color combination TV-high-fi. "A fine interview," he remarked to one of his brothers.

"It's worth its weight in gold," said the second brother.

"You can't afford to misjudge people," said the third Bushwick brother.

"Certainly not."

"Mr. Morrow," the second Bushwick brother said, "well, let us face it. Mr. Morrow misjudges people."

"Mr. Bergan?" asked the third Bushwick brother without enthusiasm.

"Do you happen to know what this broadcast is worth?" Mr. Bushwick demanded. "I am not just speaking of the dollars-and-cents value. I am talking about deeper things."

"But Mr. Bergan?" the third Bushwick brother asked again, his enthusiasm in no way increased.

"Spiritual values," the second Bushwick brother observed firmly. "We are talking about spiritual values in an age that has lost touch with spiritual values—and believe me, it is no easy matter to make an identification between plastics and spiritual values. This girl has made the identification for us."

"How?"

"As plain as the nose on your face. Furthermore, suppose she marries Bergan?"

"I have noticed nothing hopeful there. Still—the TV

time alone is worth ten thousand dollars. Not to mention the good will. I will speak to Mr. Morrow tomorrow."

The following morning, going through the papers that had accumulated on his desk, Mr. Bushwick found Mr. Morrow's memo. He read it thoughtfully, brooded over it for a while and then called for Mr. Morrow.

"The point is," he said to Mr. Morrow, "that a man requires a certain special skill for personal relations. I don't want you to think of this as a demotion, Morrow, but we're transferring you to Inventory. It needs a keen mind."

It must be said that Morrow took the whole thing very hard, and even Mr. Bergan felt twinges of regret. In any case, he felt far from boastful as he stopped by Shirley's desk and informed her that he had been promoted.

"Congratulations," Shirley said.

"Thanks."

"It doesn't seem to make you very happy," Shirley said.

"What have I got to be happy about?"

"Being the head of the office."

"Big deal," Mr. Bergan said glumly. "A week ago, I would have wanted to celebrate. I would have asked you to come to dinner with me tonight. I would have made a reservation at some place like the Four Seasons maybe. So it would have cost me thirty dollars! The hell with it! You only live once."

"And now?" Shirley said.

"Now you're rich."

"Ask me," Shirley said.

"Tonight?"

"OK, tonight," Shirley said. "You only live once."

